STOURBRIDGE
CHRONICLE

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SECOND HIT

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CUT ABOVE

Veteran reporter Barging Round Britain

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PARENTS' JOY OVER U-TURN

PARENTS and care staff have spoken of their relief after plans to axe free transport for children with special needs in Dudley were shelved.

Dudley Council originally proposed the service for children attending specialist nurseries be cut as part of its budget proposals for 2015/16.

But the scheme has been withdrawn following consultations with parents and the tabling of an amendment by the borough's Conservative group at a full council meeting this week. The controlling Labour group accepted the amendment and it was passed by councillors.

A review looking at how pre-school services are delivered in the borough will now take place.

Parents attending the full council meeting cheered as they heard the amendment had been supported.

Parent Hayley Welbourne, of Halesowen, who has two youngsters with autism, said: "This is wonderful news and will be a relief for all the parents affected.

"Everyone grouped together to fight this plan and have worked extremely hard raising awareness. This is a vital service.

Stress

"I want to thank everyone who has supported us."

Fellow campaigner Rachel Gardener, from the We Love Carers group, said: "This shows that councillors have listened to parents.

"It is just a shame it came this far — all the way to the meeting itself. It has caused a lot of stress for families."

Jayne Sinden, a teacher with Dudley Specialist Early Years Service, said: "At least the service will now

By Lee Watton

continue into the future. People have been very supportive and we would like to thank them."

Cabinet member for children's services Councillor Tim Crumpton said : "We have made it clear from the outset that no child would be denied access to these nurseries because of money and that we would continue to provide support where needed.

"We know we need to look at the service in a wider context and this may involved re-modelling it to ensure everyone has access to these much valued services.

"This doesn't take away the fact that due to the continued cuts to our funding we will need to make savings but by reviewing all aspects of the service we will be exploring to see how this can be achieved."

The council is not legally required to provide the transport.

The budget, which included a freeze on council tax, was agreed by the full council with 36 councillors voting for it to be passed, 18 abstaining and nine voting no.

Councillors were told that the authority was still on track to deliver £1 million savings due to an ongoing management restructure.

Veteran fan Jack honoured at match

Lifelong Albion fan Jack Jones, aged 107, is presented with a signed ball by West Brom skipper Darren Fletcher

A BAGGIES fan who recently celebrated his 107th birthday was given the VIP treatment at the Hawthorns and was presented with a special personalised shirt with the number 107.

Jack Jones, who is one of the oldest men in the country, was given the gift as he watched his beloved Albion beat Southampton 1-0 on Saturday.

Jack, who has followed Albion since he was 12, said the gift was "absolutely out of this world".

He met Albion captain Darren Fletcher and Baggies legend Tony 'Bomber' Brown and was presented with a personalised shirt — 'Jack 107' — and a signed ball mounted in a glass case. He was also given a signed shirt from the players which his Stourbridge care home will auction to raise funds.

"It's been a pleasure to meet everybody," he said. "I just want to thank everybody. It was absolutely out of this world."

Former lorry driver Jack, a resident at Tudor Manor care home, made parts for planes during the Second World War.

He said he has been a Baggies fan all his life and still keeps up with the club now, although his last trip to the Hawthorns was several years ago.

Albion captain Darren Fletcher said the team were honoured to have Jack at the game.

"Jack said he was humbled and honoured to have been here but having met him it's us who should be humbled and honoured.

"It was a real privilege to meet him and I'm so glad he was able to see us win."

Nischa Pritchard, care manager of Tudor Manor, said: "Jack says it was about five or six years since he last came to a game. We know he's been a fan of Albion since he was 12 years old. He follows them closely."

Demand still exists for police front desk

POLICE stations being closed to the public or having hours reduced have been seeing hundreds of people per day.

West Midlands Police is closing front desks across the Black Country to save money but has justified the move by saying there was 'little demand' from the public during the evening and overnight.

Campaigners say official footfall figures show there is still a need for police station front desks in town centres, with some seeing as many as 393 people over a 24-hour period

Dudley North MP Ian Austin said it showed there was still a need for a police station to be open to the public in the town.

Dudley alone, which is only open from 10am to 6pm, recorded 134 people over a 40 hour period.

Mr Austin said: "These figures show that Dudley is a busy police station. We've been given a stay of execution but we have to step up our campaign if we are going to keep it open."

Halesowen and Stourbridge station desks, which closed last weekend, saw 63 and 64 people respectively over 40 hours. Brierley Hill front desk will stay open, with reduced hours, and saw 326 people over 120 hours.

Drivers face night delays

EIGHT nights of roadworks will begin on a main route near Stourbridge on Monday, March 23.

Motorists face disruption while resurfacing work takes place on the A491 Stourbridge Road, West Hagley.

A section of the route will be closed at night from West Hagley to the junction with the A4036 Ham Lane roundabout.

It will be shut between 8pm and 6am. Diversions will be in place along the A456 Birmingham Road.

£20m to be spent on Merry Hill centre

THE owner of Merry Hill aims to spend £20 million on improvements to the shopping centre over the next three years, expanding stores and introducing new restaurants.

Intu, which took over the centre last spring, also wants Merry Hill to open later in the evening.

It currently shuts at 9pm weekdays and 7pm on Saturdays, while Intu's sites at Trafford Centre and Lakeside, in Thurrock, are open until 10pm weekdays and 9pm on Saturdays.

Latest figures show the centre made a profit of £63.9m last year. Intu, which bought Westfield's 50 per cent stake in April, will see £31.9m of that.

Intu has ambitions to attract more major retail chains to its Black Country site and its latest report to investors reveals it is planning to spend £20m on 'reconfiguring' Merry Hill.

The company says it has been 'encouraged' by initial discussions with key retailers about "opportunities to upsize their presence in the centre".

Intu wants to reduce the number of smaller shops at the Brierley Hill complex and use the space to enlarge bigger stores, encourage existing tenants to take more space and to attract other big names.

Most get first choice school

LATEST figures show 2,809 children, around 82 per cent, were able to get in to their first choice secondary school in Dudley.

But that meant one in five pupils failed to secure places at their preferred secondary schools in September. A total of 298 got their second choice, while 70 students got their third choice school.

Dudley councillor Tim Crumpton, in charge of children's services, said it was 'inevitable' some were disappointed.

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School is in line for national award

PUPILS and staff from a school are celebrating winning a regional award and are now on their way to London with a chance of receiving the national title.

St James's Church of England Primary School in Stourbridge has won the West Midlands regional award for the Department for Education Character Awards.

The school in Kingsway, Wollaston, received £15,000 and now will go through to the national final with eight other regions. The winner will be announced at a ceremony in London this month.

Applications for the Character Awards were open throughout January. Among the criteria they needed to demonstrate was how character building forms a core part of the ethos, culture and day-to-day running of the organisation and is actively encouraged among staff and pupils. This includes honesty, integrity and dignity as well as neighbourliness and community spirit.

Councillor Tim Crumpton, cabinet member for children's service, said: "It's fantastic that St James's C of E Primary has managed to get through to the national finals for the development and improvement of character traits in its pupils.

"Congratulations to the staff and children. I look forward to hearing how they get on at the ceremony later this month."

Schools and organisations taking part have been judged on their demonstration of outstanding practice of character education during the 2013/14 academic year.

Landlord battles store plan for pub car park

A LANDLORD is battling plans to build a convenience store on the car park of his pub in Wollescote.

The Hare & Hounds Inn, in Wynall Lane, was among a number of pubs sold by Marston's and has been taken on by property investment firm New River Retail.

While bosses from the company say they do not want to close the pub, they are working on plans to build a Co-operative store on part of the car park.

Landlord Lee Sargeant, 45, said if it went ahead, the development would leave him with just six car parking spaces and would effectively kill his trade.

He said at busy times as many as 50 spaces could be filled by customers.

Mr Sargeant, who has run the pub for three years, said: "They have offered me six car parking spaces, which is simply not enough. We are a very busy pub. This would put the pub at serious risk."

He added: "This is also our family home and we do not want to lose it. I have got five children and they all go to schools around here. If we were to lose the pub it would mean uprooting everyone."

He is being supported by West Midlands UKIP Euro MPs James Carver and Bill Etheridge, who launched their party's Save Our Pubs campaign.

New River Retail defended the plan which they said would create 20 jobs.

A spokesman said: "We have been very open with the licensee about the draft plans. Our objective is to retain the pub and introduce a new store which we believe will improve local shopping choice, create new jobs and attract more visitors to the site .

"No planning application has been finalised yet and we will take steps to inform the local community when it is submitted."

Old club to become a new venue

A FORMER club building that has stood derelict for years will be transformed into a pub after plans were given the go-ahead.

The old Liberal club, in High Street, Quarry Bank, will be converted despite objections from some residents.

People are concerned the pub will cause more noise and nuisance in the area and have an impact on nearby homes.

They also say it will be out of character for the High Street and they are concerned about the hours of operation.

Support

But there has also been an e-mail of support sent to the council saying the scheme would convert unoccupied premises and put a pub back into the community of Quarry Bank.

The building, which is empty and partially boarded up, has two storeys with a gabled roof and an extension dating back to 1960s, which is used as a function room.

In a report to planners, officers said the building is in the heart of the town where it would be expected to find a range of shops, takeaways, homes and pubs.

Tennis club courts get revamp

Coach Nikki Parkes with members of the Prosser Tennis Academy at Quarry Bank Tennis Club

A CLUB is hoping its new courts will encourage new members. Quarry Bank Tennis Club, at Talbots Lane, recently overhauled three of its four courts.

It will hold an open day for prospective new members on Sunday. The club, which celebrated its centenary in 2013, currently has just over 120 members.

Club chairman Steve Jasper, of Wollaston, said: "We wanted to be able to ensure we could go on for another hundred years and look forward to a very bright future.

"Our courts had started to become a bit rough around the edges, so we formed a committee to look at how we could improve them, which led to this work."

The courts will be officially reopened at the event on Sunday. "I am very pleased with the results," added Mr Jasper. "The courts look fantastic. I have played on them myself and they have a nice even bounce."

The club is open to all ages with young children learning to play at it's tennis academy.

Brierley Hill war memorial is listed

THE importance of a war memorial in Brierley Hill has been recognised after it was awarded grade II listed status.

The memorial at the top of Church Hill which features a statue of a solider has been given the status based on its historic and artistic interest and sculptural value.

A report from English Heritage said it was an 'eloquent witness to the tragic impacts of world wars on the community and the sacrifices made in conflicts'.

The memorial has stood in Brierley Hill for almost 100 years.

Medal

It was unveiled three years after the end of the First World War in 1921.

The figure on top of the pedestal is based on photographs of Stanley Harley, the first Brierley Hill man to be awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

Councillor Hilary Bills said: "I am delighted the memorial has been granted listed status by English Heritage.

"It is a striking feature on the Brierley Hill landscape and a lasting tribute to those who have given their lives in conflicts."

Concert for two charities

TICKETS are still on sale for a concert on Saturday which will raise money for two Black Country charities.

Members of Brierley Hill Musical Theatre Group will stage the event at Brierley Hill Civic Hall on Saturday, March 7.

Money raised will go to Action Heart and The Leukaemia Appeal Fund.

Tickets for the concert, which starts at 7.30pm, cost £8. They are available from Action Heart on (01384) 292233 or The Action Heart Centre at Russells Hall Hospital in Dudley.

Libraries closed

ALL of Dudley borough's 17 libraries will close for the day on Monday, March 9, it's been announced.

Dudley Council said the branches would be shut for the day due to a staff conference and apologised for any inconvenience caused to the public.

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Frank new role for Lenny in Rita play

ACTOR and comedian Lenny Henry will star in a new stage version of Educating Rita — a play made famous on screen by his Black Country actor Julie Walters.

The Dudley-born comic and actor will take on the role of Frank, who was played by Michael Caine in the 1983 film.

The play gave Julie, who grew up in Smethwick, her big break when writer Willy Russell asked her to star on stage and she then went on to play Rita in the much-loved film alongside Caine.

Brilliant

Lenny, aged 56, will be performing at the Chichester Theatre Festival from June 18 until July 25. He said: "Frank is a fantastic, brilliant role and I have always loved the movie with Michael Caine and Julie Walters."

The new version of Educating Rita is being directed by Michael Buffong, artistic director of theatre company Talawa.

The touching comedy, which celebrates its 35th anniversary, follows English lecturer Frank who has never met anyone like plain-speaking Rita until the Open University brings them together.

Teen charged over stabbing

A TEENAGER has appeared in court accused of attempted murder after a man aged 65 was stabbed in the head in Dudley.

The 17-year-old appeared at Wolverhampton Magistrates on Saturday.

The victim was attacked on a doorstep on Owen Street, Kates Hill on Tuesday.

The teenager, who cannot be named due to his age, is also charged with burglary.

The case was adjourned to WolverhamptonYouth Court today (Thursday).

He was remanded in custody.

Sixth form day

A SIXTH form centre in Dudley town centre is holding its next open day on Saturday, March 14.

Dudley Sixth in Ednam Road will be opening its doors between 10am and 2pm. The centre offers AS and A-level courses. See www.dudleysixth.co.uk

Fears grow over worsening bed blocking crisis

CUTS to NHS and council budgets and a lack of facilities for elderly people are the root causes of the bed blocking crisis plaguing the West Midlands, say health bosses.

As hospitals struggle to cope with increasing admissions and dwindling budgets, fears are being raised that the situation is only going to get worse.

A charity campaigning for older people's care says pensioners often have nowhere to go after hospital, so end up staying much longer than they should. They often have to wait for space in care homes or for adaptations to be fitted at their homes by councils.

The Royal Voluntary Service says urgent action is needed. Chief executive David McCullough said: "This winter we've seen delays in hospital discharge reach unprecedented levels with lack of support for older people after hospital a root cause.

"While additional funding has been allocated in some areas to address the crisis, many authorities and hospital trusts are still facing budget cuts."

Dudley North MP Ian Austin blames Government cuts for the system becoming clogged and argues it will soon come to a grinding halt unless a solution is found. He is raising the issue with ministers.

"Local Government spending cuts are leaving councils unable to move patients out of hospitals quickly enough," he said. "This is a huge crisis and we need to integrate health and social care and get the councils and NHS working together."

Hospital bosses say they start planning for a patient's discharge as soon as they are admitted. Backlogs start when assessments by social care workers are delayed.

Councillor Dave Branwood, Dudley's social care boss, said: "Admissions into Russells Hall saw a huge spike in December and early January. To speed up discharges at the other end social care staff are working at the hospital seven days a week. It's credit to them that despite huge demand, the system held strong and patients have been discharged as soon as safely possible."

More evictions as debts grow after 'bedroom tax'

SIXTY council tenants were evicted in just nine months after falling behind on their rent payments in Dudley.

The figure for the period April 1 to December 31, 2014, was slightly higher than the 56 cases during the same period in the previous 12 months.

Around £1.5million is currently owed by council tenants across the borough — up by 29 per cent on 2012/13.

The council said the number of families finding themselves in arrears had increased since the introduction of the controversial 'bedroom tax'.

But the authority's interim chief officer for housing, Ron Sims, said eviction was always a last resort when all other avenues to get the owed money had been pursued.

"Considerable work is carried out to try and avoid the need for action to recover the possession of a home," he said.

Exhausted

"Evictions are only pursued as a last resort when all other action to secure payment of rent has been exhausted."

Recent figures show almost 349 council tenants across Dudley borough have moved to smaller homes to avoid a cut in housing benefits since the bedroom tax started in April 2013. The figures include older residents who have decided to downscale but are not affected by the benefit cut.

By Heather Large

Under welfare reforms, anyone in council or social rented housing faces a 14 per cent or 25 per cent cut in their housing benefit if they have one or more spare bedrooms, meaning families potentially paying hundreds of pounds extra a year in rent unless they move to a smaller home. The bedroom tax is also known as under occupancy charge or the spare room subsidy.

Figures for December last year show the council was owed £1.5m in unpaid rent payments, compared with £1.1m in December 2013.

Mr Sims said: "The figures show that the current arrears levels for the borough has increased since the implementation of the 'removal of the spare room subsidy' and the benefit cap in 2013."

The council has been offering additional support to families struggling to make ends meet and advice is available to those finding it difficult to make payments.

Net gain for library visitors

PEOPLE can get tips for surfing the web at a drop-in event today (Thursday) at Stourbridge Library

Dudley Council is running the session aimed at helping people make the most of using the internet from 10am to 2pm.

Library staff will be on hand to share a range of information and demonstrate how to research family history, use social media, set up and use email and more.

David Brownhill of the festival committee with, right, Pete Lowe, leader of Dudley Council

Festival is up for national award

THE Black Country flag will fly in London after the organisers of last year's successful Black Country Festival were shortlisted for a prestigious national award.

The festival is in the running for the community engagement campaign of the year award, which is handed out to public and private sector projects, at the PRmoments Awards 2015.

Organisers was going up against competitors such as Aldi and Barclays at the ceremony in London yesterday (Wednesday).

The festival was organised by Dudley Council in partnership with the community.

Councillor Pete Lowe, leader of the council, said: "For the work we carried out last year to be recognised at a national level in this way really is true recognition of what a fantastic achievement the first ever Black Country Festival was.

"We worked closely with the community to support them and ensure we had a month-long festival of events to show pride in where we are from.

"This news has given us all a boost as we start preparations to make the 2015 festival even bigger and better."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Titanic's history panels go ahead

TWO interpretation panels on the history of the Titanic anchor will be installed in Netherton after plans were given the go-ahead by councillors.

The boards will stand by the 16-ton anchor replica to inform visitors about the town's heritage. The first panel will detail the history of the original anchor commissioned for the ill-fated ocean liner in 1911 and forged by Netherton firm Hingley. The second will detail the story of the replica, created for a Channel 4 documentary looking at the ship's construction.

Lucky escape as car rolls in ditch

FOUR people had a lucky escape when the car they were travelling in left the road and ended up on its side in a ditch in Dudley.

Police and fire crews were called to the incident at Dudley Road in Pensnett at about 12.30am on Saturday morning.

The green Volkswagen Polo was badly damaged. Watch Commander Danny Hines from Brierley Hill Fire Station said: "The occupants managed to get of the car but there were no serious injuries."

Choir in concert with a folk group

A CHORAL concert at a Black Country church will also feature a folk group.

In Sound Company community choir will perform Like a Singing Bird on Saturday at St John's Church, Stourbridge, at 7.30pm,.

The music ranges from Hungarian folk tunes to musical theatre numbers.

Folk group Stourfolk will support the choir and join them for the finale. Tickets £6 will be on the door.

Banjo Dan's date at the marina

A RENOWNED banjoist will bring his UK wide tour to Dudley.

Dan Walsh, who is preparing to release his latest album, Incidents and Accidents, will play at the Woodman Folk Club at Ashwood Marina in Kingswinford on March 13. Tickets are priced £6.

To book, call (01384) 560462.

Hall about shops

FOOD, clothes and jewellery will be on offer at a new event at Himley Hall on March 14 and 15, the Spring Shopping Fair. Stalls will be in a pavilion in the grounds and there will be live music.

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THE BEST OF PETER RHODES

NO, I'm not a racist. I just like throwing black people off trains. The more we learn about the Chelsea fans in the Paris Metro, the stranger it gets.

FOR 800 years the Black Death has been blamed on rats. Now, scientists in Norway believe the plague was spread by gerbils, not rats. We are collectively guilty of eight centuries of historic rat abuse. It is time for royal pardons, an apology in Parliament, compensation and a full public inquiry with a sympathetic chairman. Over to you, Roland.

THE most wince-making moment in Malcolm Rifkind's chat with bogus lobbyists is when he declares that, because he is a former foreign secretary, he can arrange "useful access" to ambassadors everywhere. I doubt it. There is nothing as ex as an ex-minister. Ambassadors want to talk to today's supremo, not yesterday's man. Messrs Rifkind and Straw might get invited to the ambassador's party – but only to hand out the sweeties. Why, Malcolm, you are spoiling us with these Ferrero Rocher . . .

BACK in 1969 the hit by Blue Mink, Melting Pot, was the last word in politically-correct sentiment, cheerfully looking forward to a time when all the races would be mixed into one coffee-coloured world. Part of the blend would be "Curly Latin kinkies, mixed with yellow Chinkees." A few days ago, the local radio station BBC Three Counties played a few lines of Melting Pot before presenter Iain Lee warned listeners: "I think it might be a little bit racist now" and pulled it. The mistake we always make is assuming that today's progressive attitudes are the last word and will endure for ever. They won't. Just as we wince at Melting Pot, so our grandchildren will be horrified at the things people said and did back in 2015. Today's well-meaning liberals are tomorrow's figures of scorn.

JOHN Prescott's promotion to become Ed Miliband's climate-change boss reinforces my hunch that Labour is aiming to win the General Election with the votes of people who cannot remember anything that happened more than five years ago.

I EXPECTED the angry tirade from older readers at my suggestion that pensioners have never had it so good. But I was shocked by the reader who wants to see rampant inflation "so my money in the bank will earn more," even though he accepts younger people with mortgages would have to pay for it. Ah, the dignity of the elderly.

AND if pensioners don't think they've never had it so good, when was it better?

THINGS to do on a rainy day. I picked up an old, much-thumbed copy of Three Men in a Boat by Jerome K Jerome which fell open at the tale of the great German singer Herr Slossenn Boschen. It is too long to explain here but is one of the funniest anecdotes in the English language. But when you read it, because the language is so polished, you tend to assume the writer was a middle-class Londoner with a posh accent. Jerome was born in Walsall and, to his dying day, spoke with what one observer called "a Black Country snarl."

THE problem with men of God dabbling in politics is that they are so accustomed to their word being law that they don't expect people to question it. But we live in questioning times and, for those online, questioning has never been quicker and easier. So when the Church of England piously declared that no-one should earn less than the "decent" £7.85 per hour living wage it took only a few minutes to reveal that some cathedral jobs pay a measly £6.50 an hour. Blessed are the unwired for they shall not Google.

Don't miss Peter Rhodes every Monday to Friday in your Express & Star

Money needed for 'hamburger' island

A £12.7 million overhaul to tackle congestion around a busy traffic island is on track to begin later this year.

Sandwell Council wants to start work on the Birchley island project after plans were backed at a meeting last week.

But officials from the authority say it will depend on how quickly cash for the scheme can be secured.

Once work begins, the project is expected to take 24 months to complete.

Council bosses said a detailed business case was now being worked on after a favoured option had been agreed. Once finalised, the bid will be submitted to the Black Country Local Enterprise Board, which will decide if the cash should be given.

Councillors approved plans for the 'hamburger' island after experts said it would be best way of easing traffic congestion at the island, which is used by around 92,000 drivers a day.

Plans for the scheme were re-examined leading to the launch of a second round of public consultation – with 83 per cent of the public, motorists and businesses in favour of the congestion-busting measure which splits the traffic island in two.

It is hoped work on the project will begin this year.

Councillor Steve Eling, deputy leader of the council, said he was pleased the scheme was now going forward.

"The next step will be putting in a business case bid to the Black Country Local Enterprise Board," he said. "Some work has been done on this already but this will be a more detailed document and is a vital part in us being able to secure the money for these improvements."

Second Life on way to be writer's second hit

By Adam Burling

HIS debut was always going to be a hard act to follow but author Steve Watson shouldn't have worried, his second novel is flying off the shelves.

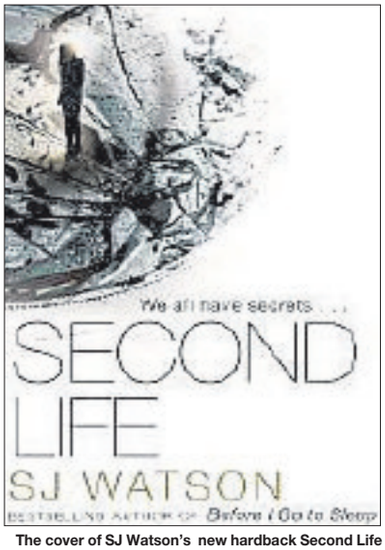
The author, from Stourbridge, admitted he was nervous before Second Life was released and knew it would inevitably be compared to his blockbuster thriller Before I Go To Sleep, which was made into a movie starring Nicole Kidman, Colin Firth and Mark Strong.

But the new thriller is now high in the Sunday Times bestseller list and shot into the top 10 lists at Waterstones and on Amazon.

Steve, who writes under the name SJ Watson, says Hollywood producers are already looking to turn it into a film.

Before I Go To Sleep was a slow-burning hit in 2011, with word spreading once it was featured on Richard and Judy's Book Club on their old Channel Four teatime show.

Steve Watson, of Stourbridge, has a second hit novel



The cover of SJ Watson's new hardback Second Life

Amnesia

Not only did the book — about a woman with amnesia who wakes up each morning unable to remember the day before — become a runaway hit, selling more than four million copies in more than 40 languages, it won the Crime Writers' Association award for best debut novel. Last year made it to the big screen.

Second Life, which is another tense psychological thriller, has a long way to go yet but early sales figures for the hardback are very promising.

The first novel was written while Steve was working as an audiology specialist in London but this time he was working in the knowledge that readers across the globe were waiting to see what he would produced next.

He again writes in the first person as a female character in Second Life. The protagonist Julia is a photographer and recovering alcoholic, who lives with her surgeon husband and their adopted son, who is her sister's child.

When her sister is murdered outside her flat in Paris, Julia sets out to find the killer, discovering that her sibling was using dating sites to meet men for sex. She throws herself into her sister's world to try and draw out the murderer but ends up coaxed into some sexual experimentation of her own.

"She thinks she's over her addiction, and doesn't realise that it's just turned into a sex and love addiction," he said.

He admits it was a mid-life crisis which prompted him to have a go at penning a novel. He was 37, his boss was retiring and he knew he was going to be offered his job. But he didn't want to go in that direction.

"I was nearly 40. When you're young, there's plenty of time. Then you get to an age where there isn't. And I always thought that one day I would have a proper go as a writer. When I had my mid-life crisis, I didn't go and sleep with somebody or crash a motorbike or buy a Ferrari, I just went on a writing course."

He was accepted on the inaugural 'Writing A Novel' course at the Faber Academy in 2009 and, on the last day, was then taken on by a literary agent.

The idea of Before I Go To Sleep came from reading about amnesia, discovering that it could be caused by physical or emotional trauma.

He decided to write under the initials SJ because it's a woman's story and his editors didn't want readers to know it was written by a man.

"Before it was even published there was a buzz about it. It felt like it could be big," he recalls.

His life has changed in recent years but even if Second Life is another bestseller, he is keeping grounded.

Since his debut, he and his partner Nick have moved to a nicer flat in London but he still hasn't bought a Ferrari. He can afford to take more taxis though, he says.

"It was a whirlwind time, but I think I have my feet firmly on the ground, my friends and family see to that.

"If I ever showed any sign of developing a big head, they would be the first to say, 'Oi mate, don't forget where you're from'."

Now he's made the big time in publishing, he's signed up for two more books and already has the idea for the next one but is remaining tight-lipped.

Meeting planned to strengthen community

A TENANTS and residents association is holding a community event to get more people involved in the group.

Hawbush Tenants and Residents Association has organised the gathering which will be held on March 18 from 8.45am to 11.15am at St Pauls, Hawbush Road.

The aim is to promote the successful association to residents living in the area and recruit new members.

The drop-in event provides people with the opportunity to meet existing members. They can chat about any ideas and concerns they may have about the Hawbush estate.

Those who attend will also have the opportunity to meet representatives from the Neighbourhood Police Team, Winter Warmth Advisors, Dudley Health Watch and Dudley CAB.

Councillor Gaye Partridge, cabinet member for housing and community safety, said: "Hawbush is a very established and successful TRA who have made many good improvements to the estate. They want to get as many tenants and residents living in the area to become involved in the association and help shape housing services for the benefit of their communities."

Bomber brew is on the way

A BREWERY will be reviving beers as part of its centenary celebrations.

Holden's Brewery in Woodsetton is brewing its favourites from the past as a special ale each month. This month it relaunches the 5.3 per cent Whispering Death.

A brew created in honour of West Bromwich Albion hero Tony Brown will be served in its pubs during April. The 4.1 per cent bitter is called Bomber Brown.

The family-run brewery on Sedgley Road West will be holding an open weekend to mark the centenary on July 18 and 19.

Football tourny

A SEVEN-a-side tournament for footballers with disabilities is being held at Wall Heath. The event, run by Kewford Eagles, is at Eagles Park on June 7. There will be competitions for adults and children. Email jw004h5501@blueyonder.co.uk for details.

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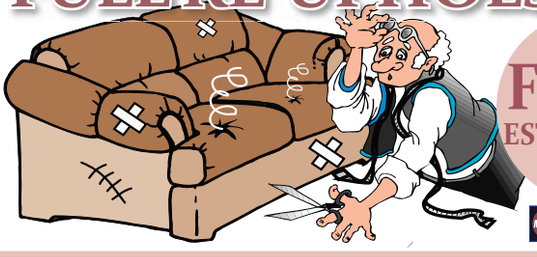
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Hot topics discussed at council meeting

COMMUNITY meetings in Dudley are being spiced up – by being held in a curry house.

East2West Fusion in Brettell Lane, Amblecote, will be hosting the inaugural meeting organised by Dudley Council on Tuesday, March 10, from 7-8pm.

People will be able to enjoy a sit down, three-course meal, and quiz the leader of the council on issues affecting their communities or across the borough. Discussions at the restaurant will also be posted onto the Dudley borough Facebook page and @Dudleymbc Twitter feed.

People can ask the council leader questions via both social media channels from anywhere in the borough during the hour.

Councillor Pete Lowe, leader of the council, said: "As far as we know we are the first council in the country to hold a public meeting as part of a curry night. This is a genuine move to get more people involved in local democracy.

"We are committed to listening to and working with communities to make improvements and deliver services. But best of all, people can just come along and enjoy some great food at a fantastic venue."

Sally Army in need of help

A CHARITY is appealing for volunteers to lend a hand at its shop. The Salvation Army Trading Company Ltd needs people to work at the store in High Street, Dudley.

Area manager Jayne Sargeant said: "We rely on the generosity of our volunteers because they play such a vital role within our charity shops. It can be a lot of fun too."

Money raised through the shop helps The Salvation Army to help fund its work with people who are vulnerable and in need across the UK.

Coffee morning

BRIERLEY Hill residents can meet neighbourhood police and Dudley Healthwatch members at a coffee morning on March 18. Hawbush Tenants and Residents Association hosts the event from 8.45 to 11.15am at St Paul's Community Centre, Hawbush Road, Brockmoor.

Chapels restoration work to get under way

The Lye & Wollescote Cemetery Chapel, in Cemetery Road, Lye

A LONG-awaited project to restore the landmark Grade II listed Lye and Wollescote Chapels will begin next month.

West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust has secured a £1million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to carry out the work.

The building in Cemetery Road, Lye, which houses identical Anglican and non-conformist chapels, will be converted into a venue for civil ceremonies.

Project organiser David Trevis-Smith said: "Following completion of the tendering process, approval has been obtained from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the building contract has been let with the contractors, Croft Building & Conservation, due to start on site before the end of March.

"If all goes to plan works should be completed before Christmas."

Lobby

When work is completed, the venue will be leased to Dudley Council.

It will have a waiting lobby and two reception areas as well as a wedding ceremony room and an office for staff.

The building, which dates back to 1878, has been closed for the past 20 years after falling into disrepair.

Groups get use of civic hall in plan to boost numbers

BRIERLEY Hill Civic Hall could be opened up to community groups during the day under plans to boost visitor numbers.

Bosses at charity Dudley Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) also want to increase the number of shows and events the venue.

Chief executive Andy Gray said he believed there was potential for the hall to be used more during the day. At the moment it is mostly open in the evenings.

He said: "There's so much potential for Brierley Hill Civic Hall to become home to many more groups and activities, particularly during the daytime.

"We want to encourage local talent to use the Civic Hall to showcase their skills."

A consultation event was held earlier this week for those interested in hosting activities at the venue.

The hall attracts thousands of visitors each year. Dudley Council transferred its day-to-day management to Dudley CVS to save money on running costs.

Libraries

The authority is also looking into whether community groups could also take over the management of Dudley Town Hall, Stourbridge Town Hall and the Cornbow in Halesowen along with libraries in the borough.

Dudley CVS is an independent organisation that supports, promotes and develops voluntary groups across the borough. The agreement between the CVS and council is on an 18-month trial basis.

An average of around 180,000 visitors attend shows at Brierley Hill Civic Hall, Stourbridge Town Hall, Dudley Town Hall and the Cornbow Hall every year. In the summer, the council took on extra curators to help cope with an increase in bookings.

Two face trial over cannabis

TWO men will stand trial over the alleged production of cannabis in the Drakelow Tunnels near Kidderminster.

Wayne Robinson, from Kidderminster, and Jason Whiley, from Brierley Hill, appeared at Worcester Crown Court last week.

Robinson, aged 46, denied permitting production or the attempted production of cannabis at the historic site in November 2013. He also denied acquiring, using or possessing criminal property, namely a JCB digger.

Whiley, 40, pleaded not guilty to being concerned in the production of cannabis.

The tunnels were used as a manufacturing base for machine parts during the Second World War and later became a designated government bunker in the event of a nuclear attack

Both men were granted unconditional bail.

The trial will begin on October 19.

Baseball champs pitching for players

The Stourbridge Titans baseball team are looking for new members. Front is catcher and chairman Shaun Healy

A BASEBALL team is pitching for new players as it looks to defend its league crown.

Stourbridge Titans were champions last season and have begun preparations for the new campaign in the AA Central Division, which begins again in April.

They want to encourage more people in the Black Country to take up the game.

Member Stuart Walton, aged 32, a teacher at Windsor High School and Sixth Form, in Halesowen, has been playing baseball with the Titans since 2011. He said: "Since I've been part of it I've done nothing but enjoy myself.

"We've grown as a club and we can turn up to games without having to dig out the field.

"We won 15 of our 20 games, last year, winning the league. We have a very good team spirit."

Mr Walton was encouraged to join the team by founders Shaun Healy, a former colleague, and Cory Millard, from Wollaston, a policeman, who created the team after playing for the Birmingham Maple Leafs for several years.

Training is usually either on Tuesday or Wednesday evenings, and on Sundays between 10am and 1pm before games, which are played at Gibson Field, set up at Thorns Community College, Quarry Bank.

Follow the club on Facebook.com/stourbridgetitans, twitter @StourTitans, or on their own youtube channel.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Concert night to benefit charities

TICKETS are still on sale for a concert this weekend which will raise money for two Black Country charities.

Members of Brierley Hill Musical Theatre Group will stage the event at Brierley Hill Civic Hall on Saturday, March 7.

Money will go to Action Heart and The Leukaemia Appeal Fund.

Tickets for the concert, which starts at 7.30pm, cost £8.

They are available from Action Heart on 01384 292233 or The Action Heart Centre at Russells Hall Hospital.

Homes bid backed at former club site

PLANNERS have given the go-ahead for the building of 11 homes on the site of a former social club in Dudley.

The homes will be built where the old Woodside Liberal Club used to stand in Stourbridge Road after proposals were approved by Dudley Council.

Planning officers supported the application, saying it would bring a derelict site back into use.

The building will now be demolished to make way for the homes.

Museum role for Professor Chinn

HISTORIAN Professor Carl Chinn is to be the patron of the West Midlands Police Museum.

He has agreed to be ambassador of the museum at Sparkhill police station following the death of former patron Lord Knights.

Chiefs hope Professor Chinn's inspirational style will help modernise the museum, which charts the history of West Midlands policing from 1839.

Wardens lead walk at nature reserve

A SIGNS of Spring guided walk takes place at Dudley's only nature reserve next month

Wren's Nest wardens will lead the two-hour walk on Thursday, April 16 from 10am, leaving from the car park in Wrens Hill Road.

Places must be booked on 01384 812785. Children can only take part when accompanied.

Jazz band plays

A JAZZ group performs in Sedgley this weekend. The Jazziatrics play at Sedgley Community Centre, Ladies Walk, on Saturday from 2pm. Tickets are £3 from Sedgley and District Community Association.

ADVERTISEMENT

Cloudy2Clear Windows – Service With A Smile!

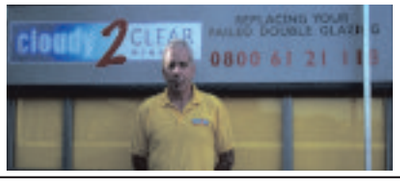
It's been a crazy few months for Cloudy2Clear Windows. The company which specialises in repairing windows which are steamed up, broken or damaged by replacing the panes – not the frames has grown rapidly as homeowners take advantage of their services.

Managing Director Brian Stanley feels that it's all about service. 'Our product is simple. If your double glazing is misted up we can replace the glass at a fraction of the cost of a new window, in any type of frame, and with a new 5 year guarantee. But it's not just about saving people money, although that obviously helps. Many tradespeople have struggled since last year and I honestly feel that during the good times a minority perhaps didn't focus on customer care as much as they should have done.

We make sure we turn up when we say we will, do the job the customer requires and leave their house as clean as a whistle. I often get comments back from customers on how they really didn't expect that sort of service which, in a way, is very sad for the service industry as a whole.'

Cloudy2Clear service Wolverhampton and the surrounding area and Brian is finding that his approach is a major factor in his success. 'The truth is that it's not just the personal satisfaction that I get from doing a good job but also it makes good business sense. I get a huge amount of business from friends and family of people I've done work for, which just goes to show how much a little bit of effort is appreciated.'

So, if your windows are steamed up, broken or damaged give Brian a call for a free quotation on **0800 61 21 118** and he'll be happy to help!



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IN MY VIEW

with Mark Andrews

A GROUP of around 200 of us stood in the driving rain on a cold night, but there was not a word of complaint.

Most of the crowd were made up of teenagers, who are not noted for being early risers, but there was not a murmur of dissent about having had to get up at 3.30 in the morning.

There is something about Auschwitz which puts our everyday moans into perspective.

Last week, the Holocaust Educational Trust took a party of youngsters from schools across the West Midlands to the notorious Nazi death camp in Poland, and it was a privilege to be able to join them.

Today, many of us think we are reasonably well informed about what went on, but it is only when you stand in the locations where so many people came about their deaths that you can possibly comprehend the enormity of it all.

Holocaust

The scratch marks in the gas chambers, which had been designed to look like shower blocks, where the victims of the Holocaust would have tried to cling to life as they breathed their last.

The masses of human hair, mercilessly shaven from the prisoners to make the lining of soldiers' trousers.

The clinical, Germanic efficiency, which saw every item of the victims' possessions fastidiously sorted and steam cleaned before being redistributed to new owners who were considered more in keeping with National Socialist ideals.

It is too much to try to understand how anybody's conscience would allow them to behave in this way, but everybody should visit Auschwitz at least once in their life.

□□□□

WHEN it was reported that new laws would be coming into force this week introducing new limits for drivers taking cough medicine it seemed bizarre.

To be honest my initial thought was it was just another example of politicians and police chiefs hammering motorists for that heinous crime – that is of just driving a car.

Yes we all know these things can make you a little drowsy, but stopping people at the side of the road, asking them if they have been taking cough mixture?

"Hello, hello, hello, is that Benylin I can smell on your breath, sir?"

But to be fair to the Old Bill, it seems they are not looking for people who take these substances for medicinal purposes. Apparently, there are people who take prescription medicine in large quantities just for the enjoyment of it.

The idiocy of mankind never ceases to amaze.

The statue of the Slasher at Coronation Gardens, Tipton

The fighter gets the better of one of his opponents

Chris Smith has a written a book on the Tipton Slasher

Slasher book is packing a punch

LEE WATTON talks to an author who has written all about the legendary Tipton Slasher, William Perry

DESPITE his fame as one of the Black Country's sporting greats, the life of boxer William Perry, better known as the Tipton Slasher, has remained largely a mystery.

It was this which spurred author Chris Smith to painstakingly piece together the renowned fighter's story – and debunk some of the myths surrounding him.

After three years research the book, called Slasher – the True Story of William Perry, the Tipton Slasher, was launched at Tipton Library on Saturday.

Mr Smith, aged 61, from Gornal, said his quest had involved hours of research using the British Newspaper Archive and time hunting through old boxing books and periodicals. But he quickly found his efforts hampered by a number of impostors who had passed themselves off as the Tipton Slasher at the height of the real boxer's fame.

Mr Smith said: "The information itself took a long time to piece together and wasn't helped by the number of people who took to calling themselves the Tipton Slasher.

"For example there was one chap called Hopkinson, who was arrested and charged with poaching around 30 times. He called himself the Tipton Slasher but was, obviously, an impostor."

But Mr Smith said while sifting the information had been difficult, it had been a 'hugely rewarding challenge' which revealed a rags-to-riches and back-to-rags tale. The author said he had been inspired to write the book because while the majority of people knew of the Tipton Slasher, very few knew his life story.

The Tipton Slasher, William Perry, whose personal life has remained a mystery

"If you were to walk down any street in the Black Country and asked people if they had heard of the Slasher, I think its fair to say most would have," he said. "However ask them about any details of his life and they would be struggling. It is not often you encounter a figure who is so well-known but at the same time a mystery."

His research has uncovered a number of intriguing stories, including the Slasher's encounters with literary giants Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray along with the highest paid actress of the age Adah Menken. It charts his birth in Park Lane, Tipton, in 1819 and his early life working on the region's network of canals. His parents, Timothy and Sarah Perry, also worked on boats.

The book reveals by the age of 16, Perry had moved to London and worked as a navvy – a tough life constructing canals and railways. It was here his legend was first forged when he took on, and defeated, an Irishman called Barney Dogherty in a bare-knuckle fight which attracted a crowd of almost a thousand. Afterwards, Perry returned to the Midlands beating champions from Birmingham and Gornal. He was taken on by a less-than-reputable manager called Johnny Broome who arranged a contest with American fighter Charles Freeman, who at the time was being touted as 'Champion Of The World'.

Although Perry lost the bout, he gained a reputation as a pugilist capable of taking on and beating the best fighters.

During his career, he was twice crowned champion of England and became the toast of nobility and even royalty.

But all this was to change when his winning streak came to an end and he lost his title to a fighter named Tom Sayers, of Brighton.

It proved to be a double blow for Perry as not only did he lose the championship, he had also bet nearly all his possessions on winning the bout. Although not destitute, he lost the vast majority of his belongings and was reduced to scraping a living back on the canals where he started during the last few years of his life.

Mr Smith said descriptions of Perry's fights had been published in several earlier books but this was the first time his life away from the ring had been researched in any depth.

The author, who has written five books previously, said: "Because of the level of research this is the longest it has taken me to write a book from gestation to final publication.

"However it has been a very rewarding experience. I set out to not only chronicle William Perry's life in detail but also to disprove some of the myths which have built up around him.

The book is usually priced £8.99 but will be available at the reduced price of £7.50 at the launch at Tipton Library. Copies can be pre-ordered before the end of February at the same discount from the publishers Arcos Design, Gornal Wood.

WEEK IN POLITICS

with Daniel Wainwright

£67,000. That's a lot of money to get every year, isn't it? OK, it's not the salary Wayne Rooney would even bother to lace up his boots for. But it's still not a bad whack.

MPs have argued the toss over second jobs and whether or not they should be allowed to do them. It all seemed to stem from the sting on former Foreign Secretaries Sir Malcolm Rifkind and Jack Straw over 'cash for access'.

Labour will ban all its MPs from second jobs. Is that really necessary? What Sir Malcolm and Mr Straw are accused of is using their positions as MPs in return for money. Both deny any wrongdoing. And that's rather a far cry from what our MPs in the West Midlands do.

Aside from a few hundred quid here and there for appearances on TV and radio programmes, those who make money on the side do it in the professions they held before they became MPs.

Stone MP Sir Bill Cash, for example, made a tidy £25,000 doing 70 hours work as a solicitor. Stafford's Jeremy Lefroy made considerably less doing a few more hours in the African coffee, cocoa and management services company of which he is a director.

Property

Some MPs have a few shares. Others rent out a property here and there. It's not exactly the 2009 expenses scandal is it? But we know about it because the rules require them to declare all this in the Register of Members' Interests.

Ultimately MPs have to make sure they do their duty and serve their constituents. But is it any worse doing a bit of work here and there when Parliament's in recess when compared with being a minister? After all, those MPs carrying the red boxes and getting driven around in the Jaguars still have constituencies just like the backbenchers.

There's another reason, too, that I'd rather see people like Sir Bill and Mr Lefroy keep their hand in with their businesses. For a start it means they keep up their experience outside of the Westminster bubble.

There are enough MPs as it is who have been career politicians – going from university to some form of advisory role and then on to a candidacy – without limiting even further the things they can do. And with a General Election looming, if an MP in a marginal seat severed all ties with their old business I wouldn't think they were dedicated, I'd think they were mad.

□□□□

I'm going into self-imposed exile as the third series of the American version of House of Cards has been made available on Netflix. All the episodes are available at once. So I'm going to forget about the scheming in the Commons by watching the scheming in the White House.

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'Disgrace' to close unit

WITH reference to the article in last week's Express and Star and Dudley Chronicle, we write in support of the Speech and Language Unit at Hasbury.

As grandparents of a child who was fortunate enough to attend this unit and benefit from the excellent work done by Mrs Hemms and her team, we feel that closing this unit will deprive children who urgently need help with their communication skills and the chance to benefit as our grandchild did.

Children so easily get lost in the mainstream system because teachers have so many other pupils to deal with.

The language unit at Hasbury work so much more closely with individual children and they benefit from this.

Our grandchild returned to full time mainstream school more than a year earlier than he was meant to because of the work that they did there. To close this facility just to save money is a disgrace.

M TURNER
Lower Gornal

Commuter trains are better than tram plan

WE have been waiting for 50 years for passenger trains to return to 13 miles of empty rail line from Stourbridge Junction to Walsall. Now Dudley Council is wanting to give one mile to a group to test their Very Light Rail tram idea. It will prevent for ever commuter trains calling at a re-opened station at Castle Hill. What is the point of spending £25m on a mile of tram line when for £200m we could have direct links to all the UK without having to go via New Street?

TIM WELLER
Halesowen

Get rid of 'hideous' ex-theatre

I HAVE been impressed by what Dudley MBC has achieved in regenerating the centre of the town and the improvements to the zoo, museum and canal tunnel leisure attractions. The construction of the light railway will further add to the establishment of Dudley as a tourist centre.

What a pity that when looking down from the zoo the view is marred by the hideous red brick cube that is the Hippodrome. Whatever is done or spent will be compromised by its presence. That the Hippodrome attracted famous names in the past is utterly irrelevant. The world has moved on. It has been empty for so long because no one could find an economically viable use for it. Let us get rid of it and in its place create a garden with trees and the statue of the Earl of Dudley as a centrepiece, without the generosity of the Earl there would be no zoo.

B OSBORNE
Dudley

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POST
Dudley Chronicle, Chronicle Editorial, 51-53 Queen Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES

E-MAIL
Dudley.chrons@expressandstar.co.uk

Letters should be brief and MUST include name, address and telephone number. The Editor reserves the right to condense letters.

Syria three not the fault of authorities

THREE teenage girls fly out to join IS in Syria and immediately there are questions asked as to why they weren't stopped by counter-terrorism officers.

In the CCTV pictures they are dressed in western clothes, and look like any other group of young people flying off on a holiday, after all Turkey is a favourite budget holiday destination as well as a route to Syria.

Can you imagine the reports in the press if any young people were stopped at the departure gate and held for questioning probably for a period of time, which would cause them to miss their flight, in order to be sure they were not travelling abroad for the wrong reasons?

Whilst having every sympathy with their families, once again it is the British way of passing the blame to the authorities which always happens. If the girls were being groomed on social media that is something that should have been picked up by family or friends.

These are public sites, we do not need MI5 to monitor these, they can be seen by almost anyone. Exit checks will be brought back after being scrapped in 1997, so delays will then be adding to the stress of airports.

R GWILLIAMS
Brierley Hill

Don't ditch appointment for the GP

I would like to comment on an article put in the Letters to the Editor page by J James who wants to go back to queuing system at the doctors surgeries.

I certainly wouldn't want to go back to the draconian days of first-come first-served when wanting to see my doctor. What could be any better than by appointment. If a person doesn't turn up for their appointment, the next one is called.

People who have appointment nearly always turn up 10 to 15 minutes before their appointment time, so I can't see the problem. I certainly wouldn't want to queue for what could be hours waiting to see the doctor. I have better things to do with my time. It is unfortunate that people who don't turn up for their appointment haven't taken the trouble to cancel. What should be done about broken appointments is another issue, let's keep the appointment system please.

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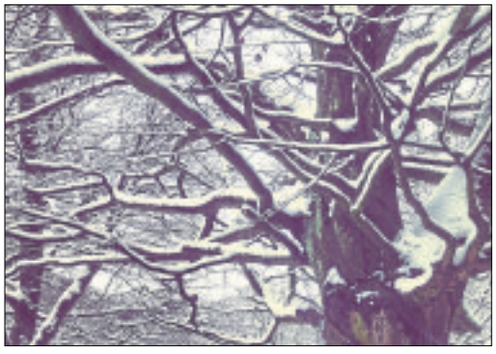
Focusing on city in black and white

Derelict factories or snowy beauty monochrome pictures say so much, explains PETE MADELEY

The New Cleveland Club in All Saints by Aaron Newell

The old steel works in Horseley Fields



Snow-covered tree in Tettenhall by Rebekah Parkes

The former Sainsbury's store in St George's Parade

THE contrast between the beauty and degradation of Wolverhampton has been captured in a series of sublime black and white photographs.

These pictures show how monochrome imagery can paint the city in a whole new light.

In recent weeks amateur photographers have sent in their entries to the Star Witness online gallery at our sister paper the Express & Star and these are just some from the pick of the bunch. Aaron Newell, a photography student at The University of Wolverhampton, took a series of black and white shots for a course project.

He said he prefers it to colour as it allows the viewer to focus exclusively on the image.

"Colour can sometimes be a distraction," said the 22-year-old, who lives in Pendeford. "Different colours have different connotations, so by stripping that away you are left with the photograph in a purer form."

Aaron said the set, which features images of his home town, aims to depict the transformation of the once great industrial powerhouse into a 'dying city'.

One of Aaron's pictures shows the former Sainsbury's building at St George's Parade, which closed last year. "For me this sums up modern Wolverhampton," he said. "It was once a busy supermarket but now it is quiet and fairly eerie. It has been in the paper a lot and people aren't really sure what's happening with the building. I tried to capture that in the picture."

Squatters

Another image shows the old steel works in Horseley Fields, the once bustling factory that now lies derelict and is inhabited by squatters.

Aaron's stark picture shows barren wasteland stretching out ahead of the neglected building, its chimney stack rising prominently in the distance.

"There would have been so much industry here back in the day," said Aaron. "There are now 20 or 30 squatters living around there. There's sleeping bags and syringes lying around inside. I wanted to capture the view from a distance to include the empty space in front of the building. To me it's quite a desperate scene and the black and white photograph really captures it in its proper light."

The New Cleveland Club, which sits opposite the former Royal Hospital site in All Saints was also captured on film as part of his project.

The trouble-plagued venue closed its doors years ago and nowadays only its boarded up frontage conceals a ransacked interior.

Aaron said: "I was standing by the old Royal site when I took this.

It's a really derelict part of town that won't be getting better any time soon now that Tesco have pulled out.

"The club's sign is cracked, the windows are smashed or boarded up. For me the picture sums up the state of the city."

Rebekah Parkes, from Perton, was taking a stroll by the Tettenhall pool when she captured this snow-covered tree using the camera on her iPhone. The 23-year-old said: "I liked the way the snow stopped on top of the branches but they were clear underneath."

Death crash driver faces 'substantial' jail term

A DRIVER was left facing prison after admitting killing a university student as she waited for a bus to take her to a friend's hen do.

Rebecca McManus, aged 21, died when Sukvinder Mannan's Mitsubishi Evo careered into her as she waited at a bus stop on Hagley Road West, near Bearwood.

Mannan, of Roundhills Road, Halesowen, pleaded guilty to causing death by dangerous driving when he appeared at Wolverhampton Crown Court last week.

The 33-year-old also admitted a charge of causing serious injury by dangerous driving after Harriet Barnsley was hurt on the same day. He admitted failing to provide a blood sample following the collision on May 31 last year.

Miss McManus died at the scene while Miss Barnsley, also 21, suffered serious injuries and was left in critical condition.

Judge Andrew Lockhart QC adjourned the case to a later date still to be fixed, when Mannan will be sentenced.

Disqualification

"Whatever else happens he will be receiving a substantial prison sentence," he said.

Judge Lockhart imposed an interim driving disqualification banning Mannan from the roads until his sentence.

Mannan, married without children, was bailed by the court but strict conditions were imposed including regular reporting to a police station. He was ordered to surrender his passport.

Judge Lockhart said the loss of life had been a 'tragedy' and Miss McManus's family had 'suffered an enormous loss'.

Student Rebecca McManus, 21, described as 'bright and funny'

Sukvinder Mannan pleads guilty to causing death by dangerous driving

Mannan spoke only to confirm his name and enter his pleas.

Inderjit Singh, 30, of Cranbourne Avenue, Ettingshall, is also accused of causing death by dangerous driving and was bailed to appear for a further hearing later in the year.

Judge Lockhart said Mannan would not be sentenced until this hearing had been completed and the results known.

Miss McManus, from Oldbury, was described as 'bright and funny' by family and friends. Teachers said she was 'talented, warm, generous and lovely'.

She was a creative writing student, poet and musician who attended the University of East Anglia on an English Literature with creative writing degree course.

Miss McManus was known for wearing her trademark red beret and had previously attended Stourbridge's King Edward VI College achieving four A-Levels, two at A* and two at grade A.

A family statement said: "Rebecca was bright and funny with a wonderful future to look forward to."

Miss McManus' teachers spoke highly of her. Jane Salmon, English Literature tutor at King Edward VI College, said she had been gifted academically as well as being a talented poet and musician.

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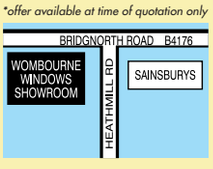

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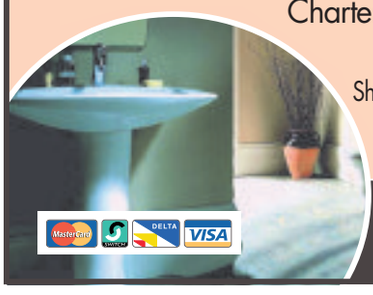

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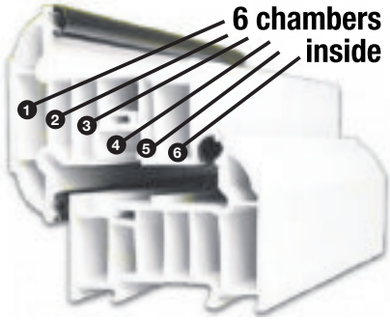

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Drug addict fined for wasting police time

A DRUG addict who lied about being robbed at knife-point to avoid paying a debt to his dealer has been fined for wasting police time.

The 22-year-old man from Wollaston claimed he was jumped by four men who bundled him down an alleyway and stole his wallet.

Police said he had called officers to report the attack but when questioned his story quickly collapsed.

Detective Chief Inspector Phil Dolby said the man's recollection of events had become 'hazy' and he eventually admitted making the story up in hope it would convince a drug dealer to overlook a £40 cannabis debt.

DCI Dolby said: "He planned to use the 'robbery' as an excuse to avoid paying a drug debt but he's now got to find an additional £80 for wasting police time. False reports of this kind deflect police away from genuine crimes. We need our officers free to attend real calls for help from the public, not tied up with people inventing crimes for their own ends

The man was also directed to an organisation that helps people with drug issues.

The hard-working fundraising team at Higgs & Sons, based at Brierley Hill, raised over £27,000

Law firm raises £27,000 to help local young people

A BLACK Country law firm has boosted the coffers of a young people's charity after two years of fundraising saw them bring in £27,000.

After choosing the Prince's Trust as its nominated charity for 2013 and 2014, staff at Higgs and Sons embarked on a series of challenges. Events included a bike ride, a five-a-side football competition and a charity football match against Aston Villa stars.

Other initiatives and partnerships saw the eventual total raised by the firm, which is based on the Waterfront Business Park in Brierley Hill, reach £27,106.

Tim Jones, who oversaw the scheme, said: "The success has been the support from our people who have demonstrated a clear desire to help the community in which they live and works. We have had a fantastic couple of years and we have been absolutely delighted to have been part of The Prince's Trust in supporting young people within the Dudley area."

The Prince's Trust supports people aged between 13 and 30 who are unemployed, homeless or facing other problems

Sonia Kaur, from the trust, said: "I am overwhelmed by the commitment Higgs and Sons has shown to The Prince's Trust for two years now. They have all been an absolute delight to work with. The fundraising amount both years has been phenomenal."

The company is now preparing for its next fundraising drive, with the Alzheimer's Society selected as its chosen charity for 2015.

Lion Dental Centre is hosting an Invisalign Open Day on Wednesday 18th March 2015. The event will be from 2pm - 7pm and gives you a chance to find out more about Invisalign. We have our Invisalign Diamond provider Francesca Dash here offering free consultations and the local Invisalign representative Laura here to tell you all about it and answer any questions. She and our nurse Leanne are both undergoing Invisalign treatment so can tell you first hand about their experiences. We also have a case book to show you some of our ongoing cases so you can see what Invisalign can do for you.

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Players left fuming as pitch work stops match

FOOTBALLERS were left fuming after a match was called off at Brierley Hill at the last minute because of wet concrete near the edge of the pitch.

Dudley Town Football Club had been due to play Wolves Sporting Community Football Club at the Dell Stadium in Brierley Hill but when players arrived they were told the game couldn't go ahead.

By Heather Large

The strip of concrete had been laid as part of work to revamp the pole vault area, which is between the pitch and the athletics track.

The referee took the decision to call off the game because barriers put up around the concrete, which hadn't dried, were close to the goal line.

Dudley Council said it was working with the football league to find a new date for the fixture.

Frustrating

A spokesman for Wolves Sporting described the incident as 'frustrating', adding: "We had players travel from Swindon, Worcester, Shifnal and Bloxwich to play only to be told as we arrived at the ground that the game was called off."

The club had tweeted after hearing the decision on Wednesday night: "Amazingly our game against @DudleyTownFC has been postponed due to some concrete being laid one foot away from the goal line #Shocking."

Dudley Town FC tweeted an apology after the came was called off.

Chairman Steve Austin said he was talking to the council about what happened but declined to comment further.

Councillor Rachel Harris said: "We have had to change the dimensions of our pole vault area following national changes in the rules by UK Athletics, in order for the facility at the Dell to remain in competitive use.

"Contractors were allowed access to the site yesterday morning, to take advantage of a dry spell in the recent bad weather but, unfortunately, the concrete took longer than usual to dry.

"The referee took the decision to call off the game because of the safety measures we have to put in place around the work site, including barriers, around the work.

"But we will be working with the league to find an alternative suitable date to replay the game at the Dell Stadium," she added.

Bus lanes get the chop in Halesowen

BUS lanes in Halesowen will be permanently axed in a bid to cut congestion in the town centre, it has been announced.

It follows calls from ward councillors and residents to scrap the lanes in Bromsgrove Road and westbound on Queensway.

However, the Queensway eastbound lane will remain in place for buses as bosses said it has helped to cut journey times.

They said a 12-month trial had shown that there were no benefits of having the other lanes for buses.

Concerns have been raised about the lanes causing traffic queues to build up around the town centre.

It will cost Dudley Council £2,500 to remove them and open them up to all traffic.

Residents have long called for the bus lanes to be scrapped, saying they caused traffic queues.

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Time to home in on advice from experts

THERE will be a larger than ever pool of hands-on property specialists to inspire visitors at The National Homebuilding & Renovating Show.

As the property market has strengthened over the past year, the updated National Homebuilding & Renovating Show, sponsored by Anglian Home Improvements, is returning in full force to the NEC, Birmingham from March 26-29 with a record number of more than 15 self-build, renovation and home improvement specialists.

And the organisers have teamed up with the Chronicle series to give 70 readers the chance to win a pair of tickets to the show.

Homeowners planning to undertake a house project such as remodelling, extending, constructing a new dwelling from scratch or revamping their existing property will find more tailored inspiration and specialist guidance to pursue their plans than ever before.

Throughout the four days, visitors will have access to the latest products, services and innovations from more than 500 exhibitors, and one-to-one consultations to discuss tailor made project ideas.

They will be able to attend free seminars held by experts and masterclasses, sponsored by Internorm, on topics including sustainable heating; financial and planning permission issues; eco living and architectural design.

Charlie Luxton, sustainable architectural designer and presenter of More4's 'Building the Dream', and Julia Kendell, interior design expert and co-presenter of ITV's '60 Minute Makeover', will also be returning.

Homebuilding & Renovating Show Anglian

HOW TO ENTER

To be in with a chance of winning a pair of tickets simply answer the following question

Who is the show sponsor?

Send your answer, with address and phone contact, on a postcard to Homebuilding Competition, Chronicle editorial, 51-53 Queen Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES. Closing date: Thursday, March 12. Usual rules apply. Editor's decision is final

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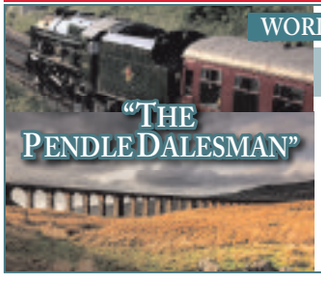

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Brides-to-be can bag a bargain

ONCE-WORN designer wedding dresses are going on sale this weekend for brides who want to bag a bargain for their big day.

They will be sold at a wedding fair on Saturday at Priory Hall in Dudley.

Some of the outfits will be modelled at fashion shows throughout the day, while other exhibitors will pass on their tips.

Couples can also take the opportunity to view the grade II-listed Priory Hall registration office and its surroundings in Priory Park, which features the old Priory ruins and is overlooked by Dudley Castle.

The Priory Hall open day wedding exhibition will run from 10am to 4pm.

For more details call 01384 815373, visit www.dudley.gov.uk/resident/living/registration-service/ or email register.office@dudley.gov.uk

Indoor market traders look forward with new optimism

A TROUBLED market which was saved from closure after it was sold last year has been given a "new lease of life", says its manager.

Keith Hampton, aged 43, has taken over as boss at Cradley Heath market.

Mr Hampton, from Foxdale Drive, Brierley Hill, says the sale will breathe new life into both the market and Cradley Heath itself.

Mr Hampton, a former bingo caller, said: "Everybody is really positive. All of the stallholders are looking forward to the future. He said: "When I first arrived, lots of people were very negative because things had been down for so long, everything was up in the air and nobody was sure what was going on.

"The market has been given a new lease of life and we are going to do what we can to get it back to the way it was."

The market went up for auction last year at a guide price of £600,000, but originally failed to sell, Then London-based Oyster Properties snapped it up in November, on behalf of a group of private investors, for just £450,000.

Dean Norton, from Oyster Properties, who is originally from Kingswinford, said the market was a long term investment, and would continue to serve the town as a market, instead of being torn down or converted.

The firm has not revealed its long term plans, but Mr Norton said the main aim would be to revamp the market and bring it to a modern standard, making it more attractive to shoppers. Surrounding shop fronts will also be rented out.

Work is due to start soon with the aim of having it completed next month. Arelaunch event is being held on Saturday to celebrate the improvements taking place.

50th birthday inspires festival

A ROCK music fan is celebrating his 50th birthday by organising a festival in Cradley.

The Mayday Meltdown takes place on May 2 and 3 at Wilson Hall at the Windmill Hotel, Colley Gate.

Enemo-J headline on the opening day, with classic rock band The Mighty Wrath will headline on May 3.

Shaun Roberts, who turns 50 on the opening day, said: "The idea started when I was with friends, Alison and Tommy Strix, discussing putting on a rock and metal night. It just snowballed from there,"

Day tickets are priced at £7. Weekend admission is £12 or £8 on the door. Call 07988070104.

Fighting back after meningitis

Recovering at home —Paul Fowkes with his wife Lynne at Bournes Hill, Halesowen

"I'M not one of those people who dwell on what's happened – I just look to the future."

That's the message from a remarkable man whose life has been turned upside down by meningitis.

Paul Fowkes was an active man who worked for an engineering company and a keen supporter of West Bromwich Albion.

But the 61-year-old was struck down by a severe case of meningitis which left him in hospital for more than two months. He lost parts of his hands and feet.

Nnow he is back home in Halesowen, battling to fitness, Paul and his family are urging others to look out for signs of the illness.

"I want to make people aware of the condition and how quickly they have to react if this happens to them," said Paul's wife Lynne, who worked as a catering systems manager at the University of Birmingham.

"I didn't think that this would happen in our wildest dreams," said the 59-year-old.

Paul worked for Griff Chains, Cradley Heath, which builds conveyor belts. Last November he was hit by debilitating flu-like symptoms leaving him confined to bed.

His wife grew increasingly concerned and called for doctors to assess him at home. She discovered a purple rash was developing. Paul was rushed to Russells Hall Hospital where doctors told Lynne her husband could have died in a matter of two hours.

He was treated in intensive care for three weeks where medics said circulation to his toes and fingers were so bad they had no option but to amputate.

The couple, married for 20 years with two children and three grandchildren, are looking to move to a bungalow in Oldbury as they learn to adapt to Paul's disabilities.

Warning to cat owners over pellet gun thugs

OWNERS are being urged to remain vigilant after a cat was shot in the stomach.

The 10-year-old cat underwent life-saving surgery after it was shot with a pellet gun in Fairmile Road, Halesowen.

Vets4Pets Halesowen have put out a warning on their Facebook page which has been shared more than 850 times.

The cat was taken to Manor Veterinary Centre on Kent Road on the evening of February 12 and underwent a three hour operation to save its life.

The cat's owner, who did not want to be named, said: "At the minute we have a really poorly boy, the current costs stand at over £3,000.

"What is really upsetting is this time a couple of weeks back we had a perfectly healthy cat. It is absolutely terrible. A reward will be given for genuine information."

Pellets were also discovered in the leg of another cat by a neighbour.

Tourist tips at museum

TRAVEL companies were not lost for options at an event held at the Black Country Living Museum aimed at boosting tourism across the West Midlands.

The 2015 Tourism and Attractions Show saw around 300 group travel organisers attend to see what was on offer in our region.

The aim of the show was to give fresh inspiration for places to take tourists.

Among exhibitors were the West Midlands Safari Park and the Dudley Canal Trust.

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Zombie event to raise cancer research cash

WHEN 30-year-old Carriss Evans was diagnosed with a stage-three brain tumour last year, her life was turned upside down.

Suffering from hallucinations and deja vu, Miss Evans, from Old Park Road, Dudley thought she was developing epilepsy before doctors confirmed the diagnosis in April last year.

Now, having had the growth removed and undergone rigorous and difficult treatments of regular radiotherapy and chemotherapy, Miss Evans' cancer, a stage three oligoastrocytoma, is now in remission, and the former children's psychiatric nurse has made it her mission to raise awareness of the disease, which is the number one cancer killer in children and adults under-40.

"You can't believe it is happening to you but it is," Miss Evans said. "The symptoms I had were olfactory hallucinations and deja vu. I was smelling things and asking other people if they could smell them too, but nobody could.

"I could barely explain what was happening to me, I thought I was developing epilepsy, I don't know how a five-year-old child is supposed to be able to tell people if they experience it.

"I went to the doctors finally and told them what I was experiencing. They sent me for an MRI where they spotted the tumour. It was a grade three tumour on my temporal lobe.

"Nobody ever expects it to happen to them, nobody ever thinks they have a brain tumour."

Miss Evans said her family were hugely supportive during her treatment, especially in the days leading up to when her tumour was removed in June, and during the painful sessions of chemotherapy, to destroy any remaining traces of the cancer. After the tumour was removed, Miss Evans went through an intensive six week course of radiotherapy, with a break of a few weeks before beginning chemotherapy, which she is still undergoing.

Miss Evans said despite brain tumours being a common killer, brain tumour research receives only one per cent of government health spending.

Now at the Rock Zombie pub on King Street, Dudley, Miss Evans will host a special event to raise awareness and funds for brain tumour research.

The eventwill feature live entertainment from 2.30-11pm on March 21.

Front, Cariss Evans at the "Rock Zombie", with licensees Amanda and Ken

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Search is on for the oldest maths set in the country

FOR generations of pupils the Helix Oxford Maths Set has been an essential accompaniment to their pencil case and text books.

The iconic blue-labelled tin of mathematical instruments has been present in classes for 80 years and now Black Country-based Maped Helix is hoping to find the oldest surviving set.

The historic stationery firm is an official sponsor of this year's National Stationery Week 2015 and will showcase the earliest tins at the event as a nod to its own legacy.

The owner of the oldest tin will receive a £50 voucher and £25 worth of stationery.

Adrian Ellis, General Manager of Maped Helix, said: "We are incredibly proud of our rich history and the fact that our products have been used by generations of families.

"We are now on the lookout for the oldest Oxford Maths Set tin in the country which will be used as part of this wonderful event. We would love anyone who thinks they may own the oldest one to get in touch."

In 2012 Helix moved its HQ to the Pensnett Estate in Dudley having battled back from administration. The 125-year-old business left its Engine Lane plant, in Lye, near Stourbridge, after French stationary giant Maped completed the buyout of the firm.

The Helix Oxford Maths Set, made in the Black Country and familiar to generations of school pupils

Thousands without heat, says group

MORE than 85,000 families in the Black Country and Staffordshire are living in fuel poverty and cannot afford to heat their homes, new figures reveal.

Campaigners have warned this could lead to 3,600 deaths. Treating illnesses related to living in cold conditions could also cost the NHS £22 billion over that time, the National Energy Action charity said as it called for more efforts by the Government to help people struggling to heat their homes.

Fuel poverty is defined as being unable to afford to heat a home at reasonable cost.

The charity has also calculated that Black Country and Staffordshire residents contribute £60.4 million each year in tax from their energy bills.

The worst hit area for fuel poverty is Sandwell, where there are 21,330 homes affected. There are 18,316 such homes in Wolverhampton, 18,129 in Dudley and 17,030 in Walsall.

Area's Air Ambulance now flying after dark

THE Midlands Air Ambulance will fly for 14 hours a day all year around after a flood of donations.

The charity hit a milestone as it expands its operations into the hours of darkness for the first time.

The Stourbridge-based charity has been at the heart of Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS) operations across the Midlands for more than 23 years. The area of six million people is the biggest covered by an air ambulance service.

By Simon Penfold

But, until September last year, it could only operate during 14 hours of daylight during the summer months and just 10 hours during the winter.

Despite the restrictions, the three aircraft run by the service and funded by public donations have carried out up to eight missions a day.

But research showed there was demand for an extended service and, backed by generous donations from the public and business, the charity is now able to operate 14 hours a day throughout the year, transporting patients between lit helipads to the area's trauma hospitals in the hours of darkness.

Latest figures show that in the first four months of after-dark flights, the charity completed 38 patient transfers where the aircraft had been on a mission after official sunset. A third of the flights were undertaken by the helicopter based at RAF Cosford, which covers the West Midlands and Shropshire.

Air operations manager Becky Tinsley said this milestone was another step towards providing a service throughout the night.

She said: "As well as providing crucial HEMS support throughout the day, being able to fly between lit hospital helipads within our extended operating hours throughout the year is significant for the Midlands Air Ambulance Charity.

"This has only been possible due to the tremendous support we receive from the public, and the hospitals that have provided lit helipad landing sites, but there is still a long way to go in improving the lit helipad network across the region.

"We have invested a portion of the public's donations to make this possible and we are delighted to have seen such a benefit so quickly.

"Undertaking full air ambulance missions at night is part of our strategic plan but we cannot achieve this goal without further aircrew training, equipment and a more robust lit helipad network, which is why the continued support of the public is required."

The extended hours mean the service can carry out another 100 missions a year.

For more information about the charity visit www.midlandsairambulance.com

Expanding business increases workforce

A CENTURY-old Black Country manufacturing firm is expanding its workforce by 10 per cent in the wake of continuing demand for its engineering services

Additional roles at Bird Stevens Manufacturing include new apprenticeships in administration and engineering. Together with skilled operatives in presswork, welding and assembly, it will take the workforce to 70 full time.

Buyout

Based in Quarry Bank, the firm was acquired by the existing management team following a management buyout last year, and they say it is going from strength-to-strength with orders coming in from both the UK and Europe.

Director Nicola Price said: "Our new business wins are a culmination of combining our traditional facilities with the latest high-tech equipment, coupled with innovation"

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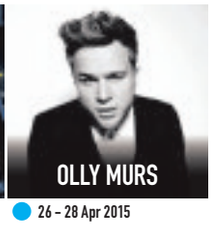

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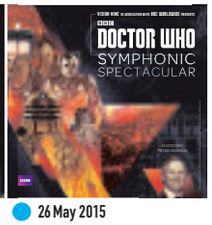

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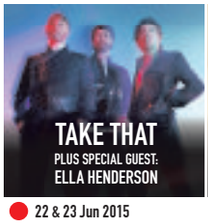

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AGM guest speaker is TV designer

Quarry Bank E TWG

THE February meeting of Quarry Bank TG was held at the Congregational Church on February 17.

Chairman Mrs Wright opened the meeting by welcoming 21 members and one visitor, and, as it was the first meeting of the year, wished everyone a 'Happy New Year'.

A letter received regarding the Mayoral Ball on March 17, with proceeds going to Action Heart.

Acknowledgments and thanks were received from Georgina Ward, Russells Hall Hospital and Mary Stevens Hospice for donations received, and also from the Congregational Church.

Mrs Writtle thanked members for the many cards and donations received on the death of her husband. Donations to go to Cancer Research.

The death was announced, with regret, of club member Margaret Beddall, who died very suddenly on January 17.

The Birthday Dinner is to be held on March 24 at the Whittington Hotel. An outing has also been arranged at The Lodge, Wellington Road, Dudley, for June 24.

There was no speaker, but an entertaining quiz involving well known songs, past and present was held instead, presented by Mrs Wright.

March 17 will be the AGM. There will be a speaker, TV designer Lynda Kettle.

The evening will conclude as usual, with the serving of tea and biscuits.

Lyttleton family and heritage in spotlight

From left, Lord Cobham, Helen Cook, Chairman Pat Martin and Mike Perkins

Amblecote History Society

FOLLOWING a brief update by Mike Perkins on current local matters, chairman Pat Martin introduced Lord Cobham to a packed audience In the Lehr Theatre at the Ruskin Centre.

Lord Cobham proceeded to talk knowledgeably, enthusiastically and often with mischievous humour about the Lyttelton family and their fascinating heritage, the recovery and restoration of their family home, Hagley Hall, and the Georgian landscaped park.

Lord Cobham is clearly excited and passionate about heritage and wants to gain more involvement from young people in order to ensure that history can be taken forward. His talk was well received and thoroughly enjoyed by society members and the large number of visitors.

To conclude Pat Martin presented Lord Cobham with a memento of his visit, thanking him not only for his time but also for the amazing work he had commissioned.

The next meeting will be on Wednesday, March 11, at 7.30pm in The Lehr Theatre at the Ruskin Centre with Keith Hodgkins talking about The Last Days of Round Oak Steelworks.

For more information visit: www.amblecotehistorysociety.org.uk

Winners are handed trophies

Sedgley Bridge Club

WINNERS of this year's Club Championship held on February 19 were Keith Perry and Brian Harris.

They were presented with the Tipton and Coseley trophies from last year's winners Mike Dainty and John Sheppard.

The club meets at the Sedgley & District Community Centre Ladies Walk every Thursday at 1pm and new members and visitors are always made welcome.

In addition, Rubber Bridge is played on Wednesday. On Friday you can learn the basics of the game of bridge while enjoying tea and biscuits all for £1, plus a £2 annual subscription to the Sedgley & District Community Association.

For further details ring Stan on 01902 561908 or Keith on 01902 671728

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Family want lessons to be learned from driver's death

FAULTY machinery and poor lighting were among the criticisms made by a jury at the inquest into a delivery driver who was crushed to death.

By Rob Cox

Gary Pickering, aged 34, of Swinton, Manchester, died when his head became trapped between the back of his lorry and its tail-lift while he was unloading goods at Home Bargains in Dudley's Churchill precinct in September 2013. The jury returned a narrative conclusion.

Mr Pickering's family said they hoped lessons had been learned following the week-long inquiry at Smethwick Council House.

It is believed that father-of-one Mr Pickering may have mistakenly pressed the up button while trying to manoeuvre the lift, making it jolt back. The Health and Safety Executive's Dr Dominic Swan told the jury that the tail-lift was in a poor state of repair and that Mr Pickering should never have been able to put his head between it and the lorry.

Examination of the machinery, which had been installed a few months earlier, revealed a vital anti-lock bolt was missing.

Mark Balysz, representing Mr Pickering's employer TJ Morris, said it was his position while operating the machinery – leaning down rather than standing to the side of the lorry – which was important.

Concerns were also raised about the loading platform and lighting in the delivery area. TJ Morris driver Steven Owen said: "On occasions it has been pitch dark. If you are there late at night the lights are off."

Company bosses said they were never told by the tail-lift's manufacturer that there was a risk.

The jury also heard the health and safety manager at TJ Morris did not inspect new tail-lifts when they were installed.

The narrative conclusion said: "There was inadequate lighting in the loading bay and the basement area at the time of the incident. Insufficient training had been provided specifically on the tail-lift. The tail-lift was defective. The pertinent risk assessments were inadequate."

Joe Morris, operations director at TJ Morris, said: "The inquest's findings will be carefully examined to ensure that current policies and regulations comply to the highest standards."

Labour's digital boss calls for more training

THE Black Country must use the digital age to cement its place in the manufacturing world, a Labour shadow minister has said.

Chi Onwurah, the shadow cabinet office minister who oversees the party's digital policy, said the West Midlands needed to be making and exporting more.

But she said Black Country businesses had to see digital technology as a chance to train their workers in new skills, rather than to cut jobs.

The minister was at Mason Metals in Brierley Hill with the party's candidate for Dudley South, Natasha Millward.

Ms Onwurah said: "We have to be making and exporting more and we need to have an active industrial strategy which supports manufacturing and exports because we're still in a trade deficit.

"There is a great appetite for access to digital skills. Large companies are investing in these skills but small and medium enterprises lose out because they don't have the time or the finance.

"If local authorities are offering the right kind of business support in a global digital market that opens up exports in a new way.

"If we can get this right it is a huge win-win, using digital technology to improve skills. If it is being used just to drive out jobs then that means companies will head for disaster."

Widow gives funeral collection to hospital

Kay Taylor with Dr Philip Brammer and nurse Nicola Smith who helped with her husband's care in Dudley

THE grateful widow of a motor neurone patient has donated £1,200 to a hospital as a thank you for his care.

Kay Taylor's husband Roy died on December 29 and she decided to donate money raised at his funeral to Russells Hall Hospital to show her gratitude for the support he had received.

The self-employed builder, who lived with his wife on Bridgnorth Road, Himley, was admitted with pneumonia in 2009 and his health deteriorated steadily from then on, but Mrs Taylor said the hospital staff helped to keep him alive for longer than expected.

She has donated the £1,200 given by the 150 wellwishers at his funeral service to the hospital's lung function unit and was particularly thankful to Dr Philip Brammer, a specialist in respiratory medicine.

"Russells Hall for all the years we had been going there had been absolutely wonderful and I thank Dr Brammer for keeping Roy alive for so long," said Mrs Taylor.

Sign up to stride out on bigger Borough Trail

WALKERS from across the country will put their best foot forward when the annual Dudley Borough Trail takes place in May.

The event, which attracts over 2,000 people, will take place on May 3 and is set to be bigger than before.

Walks of six, nine, 12, 18 and 26 miles on offer with routes covering the hidden beauty and proud industrial heritage of the borough.

People can walk at their own pace. All walks start at Dudley Leisure Centre, in Wellington Road, at designated times between 8am and noon.

The event is part of the 'Let's Get walking festival', which runs from April 18 to May 3. Councillor Hilary Bills, cabinet member for environment and culture on Dudley Council, said: "The borough trail is incredibly popular and offers walks for people of all ages and abilities. This year we're asking more people than ever before to get involved ."

It costs £3 per person to join the 26 and 18 mile routes, £2.50 for the 12 and nine mile routes and £1.50 for the more gentle six miles route. An additional fee of 50p will be charged on the day. Entry forms are available online at www.dudley.gov.uk/dudleytrail from Dudley Council's leisure centres and libraries, or by calling (01384) 817817.

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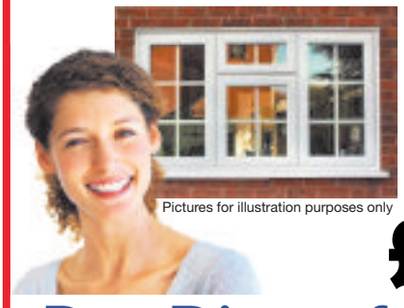
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Officers drew Taser stun guns on children 46 times

TASERS were drawn against children by West Midlands Police officers on 46 occasions last year, new figures show.

The youngest was a 14-year-old boy who was armed with a hammer.

Of those 46, the electric stun weapons were fired only eight times in total at 17-year-olds and under. The West Midlands figure was down from 52 in 2013.

In the vast majority of cases – around 75 per cent – Tasers are drawn from their holster as a deterrent and not actually fired.

That was the case on three occasions in the West Midlands last year when officers came up against 13-year-olds reportedly acting violently.

They included a 999 call-out in Wolverhampton where a boy was threatening to stab people with a knife.

By Tim Spiers

Officers produced Tasers against another 13-year-old in Sandwell after he had thrown a knife at his grandmother and attacked her with a metal crutch.

Police said that it was important to understand the figures in context.

Chief Superintendent Stuart Johnson, head of operations, said: "Tasers are not drawn lightly by officers. They are used where there is a risk of violence and provide an additional option to resolve situations that can arise from all sections of the public, including under-18s.

Training

"Our officers have undergone detailed training, including scenario-based events to test judgement, accuracy and the procedural and legislative side of the equipment's use.

"The training has been developed by an experienced group of Taser instructors and practitioners and is subject to regular updates and review.

"In many cases, Taser has helped resolved incidents without injury. Simply drawing or aiming the Taser is often enough of a deterrent.

"Taser use is recorded every time it's removed from its holster but our figures show that in three-quarters of cases they're not actually fired.

"All Taser deployments are subject of a thorough debrief by a supervising officer to ensure it was appropriate."

For adults and children, the use of Tasers by the force was higher than anywhere in the country for the first six months of 2014. They were fired by regional officers on 120 occasions.

Metropolitan Police fired the guns 114 times, while Greater Manchester Police was the third highest force with officers firing 90 times. Officers from West Mercia shot them on 16 occasions.

Ambulances wasting days outside A&Es

AMBULANCES spent the equivalent of more than a year waiting outside West Midland hospitals in just a four-week period due to clogged A&E departments, new figures reveal.

West Midlands Ambulance Service clocked up 9,874 hours waiting because hospitals were too full to admit patients between December 15 and January 11 — a total of 411 days.

Crews from the Red Cross and St John's Ambulance were roped in hundreds of times to help out. The number of St John's Ambulance shifts covered in that time was 469.

Hospital trusts are forced to fork out £200 every time an ambulance has to wait more than 30 minutes to get back onto the road. The fine rises to £1,000 on each occasion the ambulance is at the hospital for an hour or longer.

West Midlands Ambulance Service spokeswoman Suzie Wheaton said bosses were regularly working with hospitals to find solutions to the ongoing problem.

She added: "During times of peak demand, West Midlands Ambulance Service does encounter delays at hospitals. This can consequently effect how quickly ambulances are able to handover patients to A&E. If ambulances have to wait to offload patients, they are not available to respond to other 999 calls."

Ambulance delays have soared at Wolverhampton's New Cross Hospital.

Car shunted through wall in accident

The scene of destruction after the car was shunted through a brick wall in Stourbridge town centre

THIS is the aftermath when a car was shunted through a brick wall near the Tesco Extra store in Stourbridge town centre.

Bricks were left scattered across the entrance to the store's underground car park in after a Renault, which had been on the neighbouring Stourbridge Institute car park, smashed through the wall above after onlookers reported seeing a silver car shunt the unoccupied Renault through the wall.

The car that hit the Renault is believed to have been driven by an elderly man who had a passenger, neither of whom were badly injured.

The accident off Bell Street, opposite the Crystal Leisure Centre, happened around 12.45pm last Wednesday.

Suzie Wheaton, a spokeswoman West Midlands Ambulance Service, said: "There were two patients both of which were assessed and discharged at the scene. Neither required hospital treatment."

Workers spend nearly £2k a year on trivia

WORKERS in the Midlands are spending an average of £1,920 a year on 'trivial purchases' whilst at work.

A new survey reveals people spend an average of £40 a week on small purchases including coffee, breakfast and lunch, impulse buys while on their lunchbreak and after-work drinks with colleagues.

Breakfast

When it comes to buying food on the go, 28 per cent of workers in the Midlands spend £6 to £10 on breakfast, with a further 28 per cent spending up to £10 on lunch throughout the week.

Also 22 per cent of workers buy at least five coffees from Monday to Friday, costing on average £2 each.

A survey by TopCashback.co.uk found that in addition to the weekly spend, half admit to making impulse purchases online and on the high street during their lunch breaks, spending an average of £10 each week.

Half of women in the Midlands admit to impulse buys, with 44 per cent spending £11 to £20 on average during lunch breaks throughout the week.

Just 15 per cent of workers in the Midlands say they go for after-work drinks with colleagues, however, a third of those who do clock up an average spend of £11 to £20 throughout the week.

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Barging around the canal network

Book Review

BRITAIN'S prosperity was largely due to its canal network, more than three thousand miles of waterways linking the cities, towns and ports with coalfields, quarries, foundries and factories.

These were the veins through which flowed the lifeblood of the Industrial Revolution, fuelling the growth from innovative, hard-working nation to global empire.

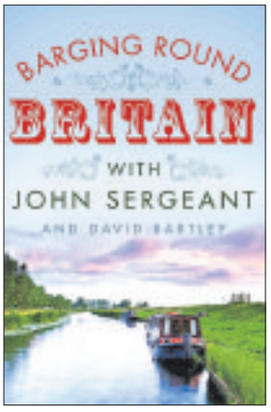
From the beginnings of canal building in the mid 1700s, through the boom days of early Victorian Britain to the inland navigations' current status as a major heritage leisure resource, the 'cuts' are a key aspect of Britain.

The official companion to a new eight-part ITV series, **Barging Round Britain** (hardback, published by Michael Joseph, £20), written by **John Sergeant** and **David Bartley**, is a handsomely illustrated book that celebrates this network's history. It is also available as an ebook.

In his introduction genial Toby Jug-like journalist Sergeant suggests there is something very British about the way we cherish our canal network. Today there are actually more craft on the canals than even during their industrial heyday.

The veteran broadcaster explores eight of the best of the most celebrated waterways, from the Caledonian in the far north to the Kennet and Avon in the West Country.

It can be claimed that the story of the canals began in Staffordshire in 1766, where the first sod was cut by Josiah Wedgewood in what was to become the Trent and Mersey Canal. This was so the Burslem-born industrialist's pottery could be transported more safely than on rutted roads that tended to leave his goods as useless shards.



Barging Round Britain is a book to accompany the current TV series

Veteran journalist John Sergeant explores the country's waterways

But, of course, the very heart of the canal network is here in the West Midlands with the Birmingham Canal Navigations taking pride of place, which Sergeant describes as 'the best of Britain'.

Rivals

In a fascinating chapter on the Birmingham Canal Company and its rivals, the story is told of how the waterways spread through 'the city of a thousand trades' and the Black Country, to tap natural resources in Staffordshire (chiefly coal).

The canals brought in the raw materials and then transported out manufactured goods that were in demand around the world, from pots and pans to guns and chocolate.

Such colossal characters as Matthew Boulton and James Watt, John 'Iron Mad' Wilkinson and James Brindley, are involved in a story with more than it's share of intrigue. The greed of early shareholders siphoning off profits that should have been spent on improvements even reached the ear of King George III.

There was also a feud between the Birmingham canal bosses and Lord Dudley over high tolls and the business-minded aristocrat's plans for the Dudley and Stourbridge Canal, so vital for the glass industry and vital for the development of the Black Country.

Leon Burakowski

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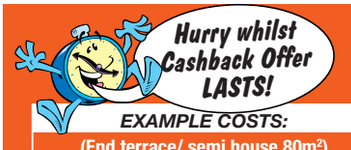

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Peaky behind Blinders scenes

AN EXPERT will give an insight into the true stories behind television series Peaky Blinders.

Dr Chris Upton, Senior Lecturer in history at Newman University, Birmingham, specialises in the history of the West Midlands. He worked as historical advisor on the popular BBC period TV drama, Peaky Blinders, which was set in the criminal underworld of Birmingham in the early 1920s and stars Cillian Murphy.

Dr Upton will be talking about his work with the production team, writers and actors to ensure the drama was as historically accurate as possible for a fictional series. He added: "I was particularly keen to ensure that the actors' accents were as accurate as possible and not confused with Black Country accents."

The talk is at 7.30pm tonight (Thursday) at Dudley Archives on Tipton Road, £2 for non members. Book on 01902 827236.

Merry Hill helps new owner see profits rise to £600m

MERRY Hill, one of the UK's top 20 shopping centres, is already helping boost earnings and profits at new owner Intu.

The Black Country shopping centre has already seen a £27 million hike in its value since it was bought last spring.

Intu, which has 20 shopping centres across the UK, has also revealed its profit for last year surged to £600 million from £364 million the year before.

Bought last spring, Merry Hill has already seen a £27 million hike in its value, to £435m, as Intu prepares to spend £20m on the shopping centre over the next three years.

Meanwhile, the company welcomed more than 400 million shoppers through its 20 centres in the UK and Spain last year.

Despite a 3.2 per cent drop in its like-for-like rental income in 2014, the addition of Merry Hill and its other acquisitions boosted overall rental income to £397 million, up £27 million on the year before.

Company chief executive David Fischel said: "Intu's improved 2014 results demonstrate we are well positioned to benefit further from rising consumer confidence and strengthening demand from retailers for quality space. As the UK's leading owner and manager of prime regional shopping centres, we welcome over 400 million customer visits through our centres each year.

"Our clear focus on delivering outstanding customer experience under the Intu brand is proving a powerful factor in the successful performance of our centres. Following excellent acquisitions both in the UK and Spain in the last few years, we also look to the organic growth opportunity from driving forward our £1.9 billion development programme."

The Intu Merry Hill centre

West Mercia gun crime low

THE area covered by West Mercia Police has one of the lowest gun crime rates in the country, new figures have shown.

Gun crime fell by 16 per cent in the year to March 2014, with 42 incidents in total. The figure represents a reduction of 66 per cent since 2007/08 when 124 offences were recorded.

It means there were three recorded firearms incidents per 100,000 people in the force's area, which includes the Wyre Forest. West Mercia Police said it was committed to bring the number down further.

Last autumn, it held a two-week firearms surrender campaign that led to 299 people handing in 328 weapons to police stations. Chief Superintendent Steve Cullen said: "These latest figures demonstrate our commitment to reducing gun crime and making the region a safer place to live."

Branch raises £33k for Poppy Appeal

Student Georgina Billington and the RBL's Malcolm Davis

DUDLEY Royal British Legion has raised almost £33,000 for the Poppy Appeal. It's a record amount for the branch.

Donations for the campaign have continued to soar during the past four years and are up from around £10,000 in 2010.

Branch chairman Malcolm Davis said he was 'absolutely delighted' by the fundraising total of £32,866 but said more donations were still being received.

The figure includes money raised by schools in the borough, including Sutton School and Specialist College, which has received a trophy for raising the highest average amount per pupil, and Dudley College.

Mr Davis, who was elected branch chairman in 2009, said he was pleased the appeal continued to be well-supported and it was helping to increase awareness.

Anniversary

"I think there are lot of reasons why we are getting more donations. The anniversary of the start of the First World War and the situation in Afghanistan and Iraq has made people more aware of why soldiers need our help.

"There was a terrific amount of soldiers injured in Afghanistan and money raised by the Poppy Appeal goes towards helping with their rehabilitation. We certainly do all we can to make people aware of why we are raising the money.

"We have a lot of help from schools and the college, about three per cent of the turnover comes from them. We also do well at Merry Hill and the Churchill shopping centre as well as Tesco, they are all very supportive," added Mr Davis.

Last days of steelworks recalled

A FORMER Black Country steelworks will be in the spotlight on Wednesday, March 11, at Amblecote History Society's next meeting.

Historian and author Keith Hodgkins will be giving a talk called The Last Days of Round Oak Steelworks at The Lehr Theatre at The Ruskin Glasshouse Arts Centre, Wollaston Road, Amblecote, from 7.30pm.

Visitors are welcome, admission is £2 on the door. The society meets on every second Wednesday of the month. For details visit website www.amblecotehistorysociety.org.uk

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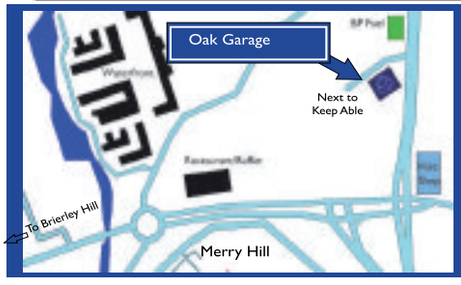

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Puttin' on the Ritz in Top Hat

GET out your Top Hat, White Tie and Tails and Let's Face The Music and Dance when a top West End musical comes to Birmingham Hippodrome next week.

Based on the 1935 Irving Berlin musical movie starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, the new stage version of Top Hat won multiple Laurence Olivier Awards in 2013.

This feel-good show features lots of spectacular dance and such famous songs at Cheek To Cheek and Puttin' On The Ritz.

Starring Alan Burkitt and Charlotte Gooch in the Fred and Ginger roles, both from the London production, Top Hat will be staged at the Hippodrome from Tuesday, March 10, to Saturday, March 21.

Jeeves & Wooster come to the Rep

PEEP Show star Robert Webb plays Bertie Wooster with Jason Thorpe, from Primeval, as his long-suffering butler Jeeves when the much-loved comic characters are brought to Birmingham Rep.

Edwardian manners are sent up in this play by the Goodale Brothers, based on the work of PG Wodehouse. Jeeves and Wooster in Perfect Nonsense, from Monday to Saturday, March 14, also features Christopher Ryan, who was Mike in The Young Ones. It has been directed by Sean Foley, who directed The Ladykillers and Mad World My Masters staged at the Grand last week.

Fins are looking up for BRIT young things Jump The Shark

Group's Blonde ambition

IT'S the hit comedy that made the transition from screen to stage musical as Wolverhampton Musical Comedy Company prepare their groundbreaking production of Legally Blonde.

They will bring their amateur premier of the hit Broadway and West End show to the Grand Theatre on Tuesday after months of rehearsals.

Katie Astbury, aged 19, will be playing the lead role of Elle Woods, accompanied by loveable Chihuahua Bruiser, real name Fiona. Katie, from Finchfield, is stepping into the high heels of London star Sheridan Smith to play the unconventional trainee lawyer.

The run, over five nights and a Saturday matinee, will mark the first time Legally Blonde the musical has been performed by an amateur company in England. For more details, visit grandtheatre.co.uk or call 01902 429212.

Legally Blonde star Katie Astbury with Chihuahua Fiona

SITTING in the audience at the BRIT Awards last week were a Wolverhampton band who are already on their way to following in the footsteps of the UK music scene's biggest stars.

Teenagers Jump The Shark are on the right track after winning a BRIT-backed national award. The group is tipped for stardom after they lifted the coveted Next BRIT Thing talent award in front of a thousand-plus crowd at Indigo in the O2 Arena in London.

The award is backed by the UK music industry, the BRIT Awards and The Classic BRIT Awards. More than 900 solo artists and groups, aged 18 and 24, entered the competition by uploading their music onto the Big Music Project website in May last year. Over 150 acts made it to regional heats before being whittled down to just 16 for the final showdown.

Lead singer and drummer Tasha Jones, a 17-year-old Wolverhampton Girls High School pupil from Wednesfield, confessed: "I am in shock. It was overwhelming.

"I cannot believe the number of important figures from the music industry that this win has put us in touch with. You cannot put a value on that.

Confidence

"It is a huge boost to our confidence. It proves that people really do like what we are doing and will motivate us to get even better."

Thomas Telford School pupil Theo Williams, also 17, from Tettenhall, plays guitar and sings backing vocals in the band that formed five years ago. He said: "We rose to the occasion and enjoyed the experience. The band initially got together after we discovered that we were better guitarists than footballers. We met by accident but have stuck together. It has been around a year since we decided to go with a four piece format and it has been great."

Jump The Shark's triumph gives them the opportunity to record at the legendary AbbeyRoad studios, where The Beatles and Pink Floyd made some of their most famous albums. They could also possibly have one of their songs featuring on next year's BRIT Awards album.

Next BRIT thing — Jump The Shark

Theo admitted: "The prospect of being in the studio where John Lennon and numerous other wonderful musicians sat is very exciting."

The band write their own music and performed their own song There's Always One. The other members are guitarist Jon Murphy, 17, from Claregate who attends Walsall College and bass guitarist Matt Gregory, 16, from Tettenhall, a pupil at Thomas Telford School.

Jump The Shark will be performing on March 19 at Newhampton Arts Centre in Wolverhampton.

Award winners on way to Midlands

BRIT Awards winners are on their way to Wolverhampton and Birmingham.

First up are heavy rock duo Royal Blood who have won lots of fans since their self-titled debut album was released in August.

The powerhouse pair from Brighton won best British Group award and will have a full house for their concert at Wolverhampton Civic Hall on Wednesday. Their support will be Mini Mansions, featuring Queens of the Stone Age bassist Michael Shuman on drums.

British Female Solo Artist winner Paloma Faith will be in concert at Birmingham Barclaycard Arena on March 19 and has already sold out her Forest gig on July 10 at Cannock Chase.

Global Success Award winner Sam Smith has sold out his March 22 date at Wolverhampton Civic. His debut album In the Lonely Hour has sold in millions.

Surreal revamp for popular opera

WELSH National Opera return to Birmingham to perform a non-traditional production of Mozart's The Magic Flute at the Hippodrome. Staged tonight (Thursday) and tomorrow, Dominic Cooke's production has been described as warm, witty and surreal.

Watch out there's a witch about when Humperdinck's Hansel and Gretel becomes a dark fantasy in Richard Jones's production at Birmingham on Saturday.

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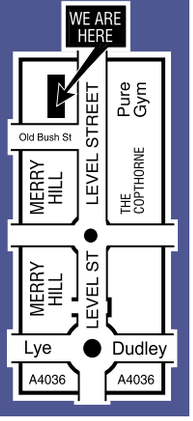

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CHOICE

Elisabeth Shue

CSI: Crime Scene Investigation (Channel 5, 9pm)

Daycia Fox was attending rehab in Las Vegas to treat her addiction to alcohol and drugs. Sadly she met an untimely end. However, when her body is found in the swimming pool of an abandoned house, there's more to the case than meets the eye; this is CSI after all, where nothing is ever as it seems. Following a post-mortem, detectives discover no trace of chlorine in the water in the victim's lungs, so it seems she died in the bath back at the clinic, and somebody moved her body to make it look like an accident. It begs the questions: who did it and why? Look out for Greg (Heroes) Grunberg among the regular cast, which includes his Hollow Man co-star Elisabeth Shue, and the ever reliable Ted Danson.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **10.00** Saturday Kitchen Live. **11.30** Mary Berry Cooks. (R) **12.00** BBC News; Weather. **12.10** Football Focus. **1.00** Live Davis Cup Tennis. Great Britain v USA. **4.30** Final Score. **5.00** BBC News; Regional News; Weather. **5.20** Match of the Day Live. Aston Villa v West Bromwich Albion (Kick-off 5.30pm).

7.30 The Voice UK. As the battle rounds continue, the contestants aim to secure their place in the next stage of the competition. It's up to Will.i.am, Tom Jones, Rita Ora and Ricky Wilson to decide who they want to keep and eliminate, but it's not necessarily over for the losers, as the coaches have a chance to "steal" a rejected artist for their own team.

9.30 Casualty. Lily tries to persuade a woman to be honest with her husband by admitting she doesn't want to continue with IVF treatment – although when the doctor's own exhaustion begins to catch up with her, it seems she is not being entirely truthful to herself. Rita helps a man change his stubborn attitude after he refuses to tell people he has a neurological disease, while Dixie is forced to give Iain a verbal warning.

10.15 The National Lottery Live. Gaby Roslin is joined by comedian and actor Matt Lucas, who pushes the buttons to reveal the Lotto and Thunderball numbers.

10.25 BBC News; Weather.

10.45 Match of the Day. Highlights of this weekend's only Premier League encounter, which saw Queens Park Rangers host Tottenham Hotspur at Loftus Road.

11.15 Match of the Day: FA Cup Highlights. Highlights of the first two sixth-round matches, as Bradford City faced Reading at Valley Parade and Aston Villa welcomed West Bromwich Albion to Villa Park; National Lottery Update.

11.55 The Football League Show. Manish Bhasin presents highlights and all the goals from the latest fixtures in the Championship, League One and League Two, including Derby County v Birmingham City.

1.15 Film: Charlie & Boots. (2009) **2.50** Weather for the Week Ahead. **2.55** BBC News.

BBC2

7.30 FA Cup Rewind: Quarter Final Classics. **8.30** Live Athletics: European Indoor Championships. **11.30** Animal Park. (R) **12.00** A Taste of Britain. **12.30** James Martin's Food Map of Britain. (R) **12.40** Noel Coward: Talking Pictures. **1.10 Film:** In Which We Serve. (1942) Second World War drama, starring Noel Coward. **3.00** The Great British Sewing Bee. (R) **4.00** Gardeners' World. (R) **4.30** Live Athletics: European Indoor Championships. The third day of the meeting from the O2 Arena in Prague, Czech Republic.

7.30 How We Got to Now with Steven Johnson. The American science author explores the impact on the modern world of technological innovations in the sphere of lighting, investigating Thomas Edison's role in the invention and development of the electric bulb. Steven also reveals how a French scientist accidentally discovered how to create neon light, leading to a revolution in advertising and the glare of the Las Vegas strip.

8.30 Dad's Army. Mainwaring and the platoon try to capture three German airmen who have landed in a lake after bailing out and intend to stay in their dinghy until nightfall. (R)

9.00 QI. Josh Widdicombe, Sue Perkins and Frank Skinner join regular panellist Alan Davies as host Stephen Fry asks a range of questions about levity, levitation and lights. (R)

9.30 Reginald D Hunter's Songs of the South. The comedian concludes his road trip through the American South by exploring the musical heritage of Mississippi and Louisiana. In Memphis, he meets songwriting partners Steve Cropper and Eddie Floyd at Stax Records, before going on the trail of the origins of both delta and hill country blues in the company of musicians Seasick Steve and Cedric Burnside. Last in the series.

10.30 Film: Good Vibrations. (2012) Premiere. A record shop owner in 1970s Belfast becomes a key figure in the underground punk scene during the Troubles. Fact-based drama, starring Richard Dormer and Jodie Whittaker.

12.05 Film: Cross of Iron. (1977) Sam Peckinpah's Second World War drama, starring James Coburn, Maximilian Schell, James Mason and David Warner. **2.15** This Is BBC Two.

ITV

6.00 CITV: Bottom Knocker Street. **6.10** Bottom Knocker Street. (R) **6.20** Bottom Knocker Street. (R) **6.35** Dino Dan. (R) **6.45** Dino Dan. (R) **7.00** Canimals. (R) **7.10** Sooty. (R) **7.25** Signed Stories: Share a Story. (R) **7.30** Scrambled!: Scrambled! **7.35** Scrambled!: Nerds & Monsters. (R) **7.50** Scrambled!: Adventure Time. **8.30** Scrambled!: Horrid Henry. **8.50** Scrambled!: Hulk and the Agents of Smash. **9.25** The Jeremy Kyle Show. (R) **10.20** The Jeremy Kyle Show. (R) **11.25** The Jeremy Kyle Show. (R) **12.25** ITV News; Weather. **12.35** The Jeremy Kyle Show. (R) **1.35** Tipping Point. (R) **2.35** Doc Martin. (R) **3.35** Secrets from the Sky. (R) **4.05** Off Their Rockers. (R) **4.35** Big Star's Little Star. (R) **5.35** Regional Programme ; Weather.**5.45** ITV News; Weather.

6.00 You've Been Framed! Favourites. Harry Hill narrates a selection of comical clips, featuring Annette Bening and Kim Jong-il lookalikes, below-the-belt mishaps, mischief and painful-looking accidents. (R)

7.00 Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway. The Geordie duo take control of Jeremy Kyle in I'm a Celebrity Get Out of Me Ear!, and Little Ant and Dec meet Take That. Rob Brydon is this week's celebrity guest announcer.

8.25 Take Me Out. Paddy McGuinness hosts an extended edition, giving the 30 single women one last chance to find the man of their dreams on the show. Hotel receptionist Leslie from Belfast, plumber Alan from Pontefract, construction worker Cole from Darlington and model Pete from Cornwall are all hoping to sweep them off their feet, and must persuade the girls to keep their lights on as a sign of approval. Paddy finds out how the couples get on in the sun, and also provides an update on last week's lovebirds. Last in the series.

9.55 The Jonathan Ross Show. The host welcomes actor Damian Lewis (Homeland, Wolf Hall), and music legend Bryan Ferry, who performs in the studio.

10.55 ITV News; Weather.

11.15 Film: Play Misty for Me. (1971) A DJ revives his relationship with an old flame, driving an obsessive fan mad with jealousy. Psychological thriller, directed by and starring Clint Eastwood.

1.10 Jackpot247. **3.00** The Jeremy Kyle Show USA. (R) **3.45** ITV Nightscreen.

CHANNEL 4

6.00 How I Met Your Mother. **6.30** How I Met Your Mother. **6.55** Trans World Sport. **7.55** The Morning Line. **9.00** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **9.30** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **10.00** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **10.30** Frasier. (R) **11.00** Frasier. (R) **11.30** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **12.00** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **12.30** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **1.00** Rude(ish) Tube. **1.30** Channel 4 Racing. Live coverage from Sandown Park and Wolverhampton. **4.10** Come Dine with Me. (R) **4.45** Come Dine with Me. (R) **5.15** Come Dine with Me. (R) **5.50** Come Dine with Me. (R)

6.15 The Simpsons. A romantic evening at the ice-rink leads to Homer and Marge heading for the Winter Olympics to play for a curling team, while Lisa becomes hopelessly addicted to collecting sporting memorabilia and Bart befriends Canada's equivalent of Milhouse. (R)

6.40 Channel 4 News.

7.00 Crufts 2015. Clare Balding presents highlights from the third and penultimate day of the world's largest dog show, held at the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham. Yesterday saw the judging of the Working and Pastoral groups, and this evening's programme moves on to the Terrier and Hound categories. There's also a special report from Noel Fitzpatrick, known for his pioneering work as seen in Channel 4 series The Supervet.

9.00 Film: Salt. (2010) A CIA agent is accused of being a sleeper assassin with a deadly purpose – to kill the Russian president during a diplomatic visit and start a third world war. She goes on the run, with her colleagues in hot pursuit – but each attempt to prove her innocence only raises more questions about her identity. Action thriller, starring Angelina Jolie and Chiwetel Ejiofor.

11.00 Film: Heartbreakers. (2001) A mother and daughter con rich bachelors out of a fortune, but their plans are threatened when the daughter falls in love. Comedy, with Sigourney Weaver.

1.20 Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA. (R) **2.10** Hollyoaks. (R) **4.15** Hugh's 3 Good Things: Best Bites. (R) **4.30** Double Your House for Half the Money. (R) **5.25** Location, Location, Location. (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake! **10.00** SpongeBob SquarePants. **10.35** Chinese Food in Minutes. (R) **10.50** The Hotel Inspector. (R) **11.45** The Hotel Inspector. (R) **12.40** GPs: Behind Closed Doors. (R) **1.35** Cowboy Builders. (R) **2.35** Missing: Flight MH370 One Year On. (R) **3.35 Film:** Monte Walsh. (1970) Western, starring Lee Marvin. **5.30** 5 News Weekend. **5.40 Film:** Columbo: Candidate for Crime. (1973) Detective drama, starring Peter Falk.

7.20 NCIS. The murder of a marine during a cruise is investigated by the agents, who discover the victim had turned his back on a life of privilege to join the military. (R)

8.05 NCIS. A navy recruitment officer is murdered at a high school and the agents discover he had recently begun a relationship with a married teacher whose wife held a grudge against him. They also find out a student's father was vehemently opposed to his joining the military, and receive help from an unexpected quarter – Ducky's esteemed predecessor, Dr Magnus. (R)

9.00 CSI: Crime Scene Investigation. A body found in the swimming pool of an abandoned house is identified as Daycia Fox, who was attending rehab in Las Vegas to treat her addiction to alcohol and drugs. The post-mortem reveals no trace of chlorine in the water in the victim's lungs and the team concludes she died in the bath back at the clinic, with somebody moving the body to make it look like a tragic accident.

10.00 Law & Order: Special Victims Unit. Saliva from a tiger is discovered on a murdered model, leading the detectives on the hunt for a former people trafficker who is now involved in the exotic animal trade. (R)

10.55 Law & Order. An investigation into a hit-and-run leads to a property scam, but the team's undercover work takes a surprising twist that pits McCoy against the US Attorney's office. Previously seen on 5USA.

11.50 True Crimes: The First 72 Hours. Winnipeg police are baffled by a bank robber who does not fit the usual profile of a thief. (R)

12.15 SuperCasino. **3.10** 10,000 BC. (R) **4.00** Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole. (R) **4.50** Make It Big. (R) **5.15** Angels of Jarm. (R) **5.40** Roary the Racing Car. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Three

7.00 Great TV Mistakes **8.00** Top Gear **9.00** Russell Howard's Good News **9.30 Film:** Adventureland (2009) **11.10** Family Guy **1.00** Uncle **1.30** Russell Howard's Good News **2.00** South Side Story **2.30** Sexy Beasts **4.00** Close

BBC Four

7.00 The Secret Life of Elephants **8.00** Lost Kingdoms of Central America **9.00** Hostages **10.45** Pompeii: The Mystery of the People Frozen in Time **11.45** TOTP2: 80s Special **12.45** Charlie Brooker's Weekly Wipe **1.15** Top of the Pops: 1980 **1.50** The Secret Life of Elephants **2.50** Lost Kingdoms of Central America

ITV2

11.10 Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway **12.35** Catchphrase **1.20 Film:** Batteries Not Included (1987) **3.25** You've Been Framed! **4.00 Film:** The Princess Diaries 2: Royal Engagement (2004) **6.15 Film:** Mr Bean's Holiday (2007) **8.00 Film:** Jurassic Park III (2001) **9.55** Take Me Out – The Gossip **10.55** Ibiza Weekender **11.55** The Keith Lemon Sketch Show **12.20** Reality Bites **1.05** Crazy Beaches **1.30** Hell's Kitchen **2.15** Fake Reaction **2.50** Teleshopping **5.50** ITV2 Nightscreen

ITV3

11.40 The Darling Buds of May **12.50** A Touch of Frost **3.00 Film:** Carry On Cowboy (1966) **5.00** Agatha Christie's Marple **7.00** Doc Martin **8.00** Foyle's War **10.05** Lewis **12.10** A Touch of Frost **2.10** ITV3 Nightscreen **2.30** Teleshopping

ITV4

11.45 Live Darts: UK Open. Coverage of the second day at the Butlins Minehead Resort. **5.00** Storage Wars **6.00** Storage Wars: Texas **7.00** Live Darts: UK Open. **11.00** Cricket World Cup Highlights **12.00 Film:** Buried (2010) **2.00** Hogan's Heroes **3.00** Teleshopping

E4

11.00 Made in Chelsea **12.00** Taking New York **1.00** Marry Me **1.30** New Girl **2.30** Melissa & Joey **3.30** Baby Daddy **4.30** How I Met Your Mother **5.30** The Big Bang Theory **9.00 Film:** Beverly Hills Cop II (1987) **11.05** The Big Bang Theory **11.30** Rude Tube **12.35** How I Met Your Mother **1.35** The Cleveland Show **3.10** One Tree Hill **3.50** Desperate Housewives

Film4

11.00 Treasure Island (1972) **1.00** Rio (2011) **3.00** The Hunt for Red October (1990) **5.55** Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen (2009) **9.00** Serenity (2005) **11.20** AVPR: Aliens vs Predator – Requiem (2007) **1.10** Predators (2010) **3.25** Close

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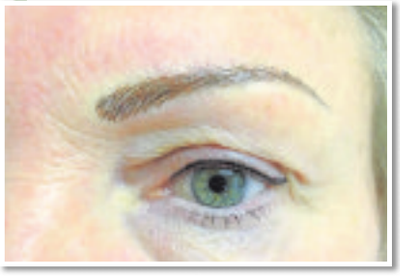

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Aidan Turner

Poldark (BBC1, 9pm)
New series. Period drama based on the novels by Winston Graham, originally adapted into a successful 1970s TV series. In late 18th-century Cornwall, Ross Poldark joins the army to avoid charges of smuggling, leaving behind his loved one Elizabeth – and when he returns three years later, having fought in the American War of Independence, he finds his father dead, his estate in ruins and his sweetheart engaged to another man. In need of help, he takes on a new kitchen maid after rescuing her from a beating – bringing him into conflict with hostile locals. Aidan Turner takes the title role, with Eleanor Tomlinson, Heida Reed, Warren Clarke, Mary Woodvine, Harriet Ballard, Robert Daws, Kyle Soller and Caroline Blakiston.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **7.45** Match of the Day. (R) **8.20** Match of the Day: FA Cup Highlights. (R) **9.00** The Andrew Marr Show. **10.00** The Big Questions. **11.00** Sunday Politics. **12.15** BBC News. **12.25** Songs of Praise. **1.00** Live Davis Cup Tennis. Great Britain v USA. **3.35** Bargain Hunt. (R) **4.05** Escape to the Country. (R) **4.50** Pointless Celebrities. (R) **5.35** BBC News; Regional News; Weather.

6.00 The Big Painting Challenge. The amateur artists travel to Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire, the birthplace and ancestral home of Winston Churchill. Their first challenge sees them arranging a collection of personal items – from a large yellow hat to a skull – which they must capture on canvas using acrylics. This is followed by a quick 30-minute sketch of a giant chess board, ensuring that light and shadow are just as important as perspective and scale. In their last chance to impress before the elimination, the hopefuls paint the facade of the palace, attempting to capture the drama of its stunning architecture.

7.00 Countryfile. The team is in rural Cheshire, where Matt Baker joins an agricultural student working on his father's farm and Ellie Harrison discovers what life was like for Victorian apprentices.

8.00 Call the Midwife. Trixie and Sister Mary Cynthia team up to support a deaf mother-to-be, while a case of morning sickness proves more serious than initially suspected. Last in the series.

9.00 Poldark. New series. Period drama about a young aristocrat who returns from the battlefield to find his estate in ruins and his sweetheart engaged to another man. Aidan Turner stars.

10.00 BBC News; Regional News; Weather.

10.30 Match of the Day: FA Cup Highlights. Highlights of the third match in the FA Cup sixth round, as Liverpool faced Blackburn Rovers at Anfield.

11.05 The Apprentice USA. In an extended edition featuring two tasks, the teams have to promote and sell tickets to a live comedy event, and then film a 60-second advertisement for a new car safety device.

1.10 Weather for the Week Ahead. **1.15** BBC News.

BBC2

6.10 The Football League Show. (R) **7.30** Gardeners' World. (R) **8.00** Countryfile. (R) **9.00** FA Cup Rewind: Sixth-Round Classics. **10.00** Saturday Kitchen Best Bites. **11.30** The Great Comic Relief Bake Off. (R) **12.30** A Taste of Britain. **1.00** A Taste of Britain; Weather for the Week Ahead. **1.30** Live Athletics: European Indoor Championships. The final day of the meeting from the O2 Arena in Prague, Czech Republic. **5.35** Super-Powered Owls: Natural World. (R)

6.35 Pompidou. The penniless aristocrat thinks he has won the lottery, but it turns out that it his butler Hove who has actually hit the jackpot. Comedy, starring Matt Lucas.

7.00 The Fifteen Billion Pound Railway. The concluding episode of the documentary about the construction of the Crossrail train line linking east and west London follows the work of engineers building 10 new stations. A team battles to put together the giant jigsaw that will become a cathedral-sized station at Canary Wharf. Last in the series. (R)

8.00 Top Gear. James May competes in a world rallycross race and Richard Hammond tests the new version of the Mazda MX-5. Plus, Nicholas Hoult is the Star in the Reasonably Priced Car.

9.00 Let's Play Darts for Comic Relief. Gabby Logan is joined on the sofa by the celebrity players, who reflect on the highs and lows of the tournament so far and discuss the eagerly anticipated final. Then the competition reaches its climax as the two remaining famous faces and their professional partners go head to head for the title at the Lakeside Country Club in Frimley Green, Surrey. Last in the series.

10.05 The Revolution Will Be Televised. First of two compilations from the first three series of the sketch show lampooning arrogance, hypocrisy and greed in public life, starring Heydon Prowse and Jolyon Rubinstein.

10.35 Film: The Hunter. (2011) Premiere. Drama, starring Willem Dafoe, Frances O'Connor and Sam Neill.

12.10 Film: Howl. (2010) **1.30** Sign Zone: Countryfile. (R) **2.25** Holby City. (R) **3.25** This Is BBC Two.

ITV

6.00 CITV: Bottom Knocker Street. **6.10** Bottom Knocker Street. (R) **6.20** Bottom Knocker Street. (R) **6.35** Dino Dan. (R) **6.45** Dino Dan. (R) **7.00** Canimals. (R) **7.10** Sooty. (R) **7.25** Signed Stories: Share a Story. (R) **7.30** Scrambled!: Scrambled! **7.35** Scrambled!: Nerds & Monsters. (R) **7.50** Scrambled!: Ultimate Spider-Man. **8.30** Scrambled!: Horrid Henry. **8.50** Scrambled!: Deadtime Stories. (R) **9.25** The Jeremy Kyle Show. (R) **10.25** The Jeremy Kyle Show. (R) **11.30** The Jeremy Kyle Show. (R) **12.35** ITV News; Weather. **12.40** Murder, She Wrote. (R) **1.40** River Monsters. (R) **2.40** Catchphrase. (R) **3.25 Film:** The Living Daylights. (1987) James Bond adventure, starring Timothy Dalton.

6.00 Regional Programme; Weather.

6.15 ITV News; Weather.

6.30 The Chase: Celebrity Special. Former England cricket captain Michael Vaughan, presenter Anna Richardson, bushcraft expert Ray Mears and Coronation Street actress Jane Danson play for charity. Last in the series.

7.30 Off Their Rockers. A foul-mouthed nun runs amok, Seb gets advice on attending a naturist wedding and Dave gives a member of the public his lucky pants.

8.00 All Star Family Fortunes. Former X Factor winner Sam Bailey and Loose Women panellist Jamelia team up with their families in an attempt to win a jackpot of £30,000 for charity.

9.00 Mr Selfridge. Nancy begins to feel the weight of her deception over her fling with Harry, Victor and Violette take a romantic trip to the coast, and Mr Grove finds out the truth from Miss Mardle.

10.00 ITV News; Weather.

10.15 Bear Grylls: Mission Survive. Tensions reach boiling point as the celebrities face their toughest challenge yet, navigating down a powerful river, building shelters, catching food and enduring a tropical storm. (R)

11.15 Premiership Rugby Union. Highlights from the 17th round of fixtures, including Bath v Sale Sharks at the Recreation Ground, Exeter Chiefs v London Welsh at Sandy Park and Wasps v Saracens at Ricoh Arena.

12.05 The Store. **2.25** The Jeremy Kyle Show USA. (R) **3.10** ITV Nightscreen. **5.05** The Jeremy Kyle Show. (R)

CHANNEL 4

6.20 How I Met Your Mother. **6.45** How I Met Your Mother. **7.10** How I Met Your Mother. **7.35** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **8.00** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **8.30** Frasier. (R) **9.00** Frasier. (R) **9.30** Sunday Brunch. **12.30** Amazing Spaces Shed of the Year. (R) **1.30** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **2.00** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **2.30** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **2.55 Film:** Bride Wars. (2009) Comedy, starring Kate Hudson and Anne Hathaway. **4.40** Location, Location, Location. (R) **5.40** Channel 4 News.

6.05 A Place in the Sun: Home or Away. Jasmine Harman and Jonnie Irwin meet a man who wants to buy a place in the south-west of France, and his partner, who is nervous of taking the plunge and would prefer Devon.

7.00 Crufts 2015: Best in Show. The final day concludes with the most prestigious prize of the competition – the Best in Show – as Clare Balding goes behind the scenes during the build-up, meets the participants and reports live from the NEC in Birmingham as the winner is announced. Last in the series.

9.00 Indian Summers. There's much excitement in Simla as the Viceroy arrives for the first of his summer visits. Ralph is troubled when he discovers the only piece of evidence that linked Chandru Mohan to the Congress Party has gone missing. Aafrin finds himself in danger when he learns there will be a search of the properties of all those who had access to the stolen item. Ian is forced to grow up quickly when he receives sad news about his uncle, while Eugene threatens to return to Chicago with Madeleine. Sarah receives information from England that sheds light on Alice's mysterious past.

10.00 8 Out of 10 Cats Does Countdown. Jimmy Carr hosts this comedy take on the quiz, with team captains Sean Lock and Jon Richardson joined by Jo Brand and Claudia Winkleman. Bill Bailey is in Dictionary Corner. (R)

11.05 Film: The Twilight Saga: New Moon. (2009) Romantic fantasy sequel, starring Kristen Stewart.

1.25 Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA. (R) **2.20** Come Dine with Me. (R) **4.40** River Cottage Veg Heroes. (R) **5.05** Location, Location, Location. (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake!: Peppa Pig. **6.05** Bananas in Pyjamas. (R) **6.20** Angelina Ballerina. (R) **6.30** Pip Ahoy! (R) **6.45** The Mr Men Show. (R) **6.55** Chloe's Closet. (R) **7.05** Olly the Little White Van. **7.10** Make Way for Noddy. (R) **7.25** Roary the Racing Car. (R) **7.35** Paw Patrol. (R) **7.50** Little Princess. (R) **8.00** Wanda and the Alien. (R) **8.10** Zack and Quack. **8.25** Toby's Travelling Circus. (R) **8.35** Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom. (R) **8.45** Jelly Jamm. (R) **9.05** LazyTown. (R) **9.30** Dora and Friends. **10.00** SpongeBob SquarePants. **10.35** The Dog Rescuers. (R) **11.00** The Hotel Inspector. (R) **12.00** The Hotel Inspector. (R) **12.55** The Hotel Inspector. (R) **1.55 Film:** The Reef. (2006) Premiere. Animated adventure, with the voice of Freddie Prinze Jr. **3.25 Film:** Open Season 2. (2008) Animated comedy sequel, with the voice of Joel McHale. **4.55 Film:** Mulan. (1998) Disney animated adventure, with the voices of Ming-Na and Eddie Murphy.

6.35 5 News Weekend.

6.40 Film: Hitch. (2005) A professional relationship guru, who specialises in offering advice to lonely single men, helps an unlucky-in-love accountant to woo the girl of his dreams. However, when he finds himself falling for a beautiful gossip columnist, his usual charm abandons him and he discovers his expertise counts for nothing. Romantic comedy, with Will Smith. Edited for violence and language.

9.00 Film: 21 Jump Street. (2012) Cops Schmidt and Jenko hated each other when they were at school together, but have grown up to become friends. They are forced to relive the horrors of their adolescence when their captain decides their youthful appearance makes them the perfect undercover agents to crack a high-school drug ring. Comedy inspired by the 1980s TV series, with Jonah Hill and Channing Tatum. Edited for language.

11.15 Film: Dodgeball: A True Underdog Story. (2004) The struggling owner of a run-down gym tries to save his business by forming a team for the US dodgeball championships. Sporting comedy, starring Ben Stiller and Vince Vaughn.

1.05 SuperCasino. **3.10** The Gadget Show. (R) **4.00** House Doctor. (R) **4.25** Make It Big. (R) **5.15** Angels of Jarm. (R) **5.40** Roary the Racing Car. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Three
7.00 The Voice UK **9.00** Russell Howard's Good News **10.00** I Survived a Zombie Apocalypse **11.00** Family Guy **11.45** American Dad! **12.05** Family Guy **12.30** I Survived a Zombie Apocalypse **1.30** Uncle **2.00** South Side Story **2.30** Sexy Beasts

BBC Four
7.00 The Great War **7.40** New Forest Badgers **7.50** Dancing Cranes of Sweden **8.00** Royal Television Society Huw Wheldon Memorial Lecture: Public Service Broadcasting – A House of Cards? **8.45** Wild Scotland **9.00** A Wolf Called Storm: Natural World Special **10.00** Storyville: India's Daughter **11.00 Film:** Bright Days Ahead (2013) **12.30** Boy George and Culture Club: Karma to Calamity **1.30** Nile Rodgers: The Hitmaker **2.30** The New Romantics – A Fine Romance **3.20** Sounds of the Eighties **3.50** Close

ITV2
11.30 Take Me Out **1.00** Take Me Out – The Gossip **2.00** You've Been Framed! **2.30** Scorpion **3.25** Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway **4.50 Film:** The Smurfs (2011) **6.55 Film:** Freaky Friday (2003) **9.00** Ibiza Weekender **10.00** The Keith Lemon Sketch Show **10.30 Film:** American Pie Presents: The Naked Mile (2006) **12.40** Mom **1.30** Crazy Beaches **1.55** Life's Funniest Moments **2.15** Teleshopping **5.45** ITV2 Nightscreen

ITV3
11.20 Rosemary & Thyme **12.20** A Touch of Frost **2.30** Jane Eyre **4.40** Agatha Christie's Marple **6.45** Inspector Morse **9.00** Sunday Night at the Palladium **10.00** Birds of a Feather **10.30** City Lights **11.35 Film:** Chaplin (1992) **2.20** Perspectives: David Suchet – People I Have Shot **3.10** Judge Judy **3.30** ITV3 Nightscreen **3.40** Emmerdale

ITV4
12.45 Live Darts: UK Open. **5.00** Storage Wars **6.00** The Big Fish Off **7.00** Live Darts: UK Open. **11.00** Cricket World Cup Highlights **12.00** Brian Lara: Sports Life Stories **1.00** River Monsters: Untold Stories **2.00** Hell on Wheels **2.55** ITV4 Nightscreen **3.00** Teleshopping

E4
12.30 Revenge **1.30** Marvel's Agents of SHIELD **2.30** The 100 **3.30** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **4.00** The Big Bang Theory **6.30 Film:** Iron Man (2008) **9.00** Troy **10.00** Rude Tube **11.05** The Big Bang Theory **11.35** Tattoos After Dark **12.35** Taking New York **1.40** 2 Broke Girls **2.05** Rules of Engagement **2.50** One Tree Hill **3.30** Hollyoaks

Film4
11.00 Brief Encounter (1945) **1.00** Step Up 3 (2010) **3.20** Jumper (2008) **5.05** Porridge (1979) **6.55** Playing for Keeps (2012) **9.00** The Adjustment Bureau (2011) **11.05** The Fourth Kind (2009) **1.05** Kelly + Victor (2012)

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FILM CHOICES

MONDAY
The Fugitive, Channel 5, 11pm
A doctor is convicted of his wife's murder and forced to go on the run to prove his innocence – but his efforts to find the mysterious one-armed man he believes is the real killer are hampered by a tenacious US marshal. Thriller, starring Harrison Ford, an Oscar-winning Tommy Lee Jones, Sela Ward, Julianne Moore and Joe Pantoliano. (1993)

TUESDAY
Hollywoodland, BBC1, 11.40pm
Fact-based mystery focusing on the life and sudden death of actor George Reeves, famed for his role as Superman in the 1950s TV series. The story is told in flashback through the eyes of a private investigator hired by Reeves' mother to unearth the truth surrounding his mysterious fate. Starring Ben Affleck, Adrien Brody, Diane Lane and Bob Hoskins. (2006)

WEDNESDAY
Shifty, BBC1, 12.25am
London cocaine dealer Shifty finds his outlook transformed by the return of his best friend Chris after four years away. As the pair spend the day together, Shifty struggles to deal with a persistent addict and a rival with a score to settle, while at the same time confronting the bleak future he finds himself facing. Drama, starring Riz Ahmed, Daniel Mays and Jason Flemyng. (2008)

The Fugitive, Monday, Channel 5, 11pm

FRIDAY
Kick-Ass, Channel 4, 10pm
A teenage comic-book fan sets out to become a real-life superhero. His amateur crime-fighting exploits make him a media sensation, but he is soon in over his head as he encounters a sadistic gangster and a father-daughter vigilante team with a far more lethal approach to cleaning up the streets. Comic-book action comedy, with Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Chloe Grace Moretz and Nicolas Cage. (2010)

10,000 BC, ITV, 11.40pm
In prehistoric times, a young mammoth-hunter bravely combats ferocious creatures as he journeys across the wilderness to rescue his captive lover and her fellow villagers from brutal slave raiders. Roland Emmerich's fantasy adventure, starring Steven Strait, Camilla Belle, Cliff Curtis and Joel Virgel. (2008)

PICK OF THE WEEK

Term-time is over as drama bids farewell

That's all folks – Waterloo Road is closing its doors for good. Almost a grown-up version of the much-missed Grange Hill, this drama was originally commissioned for just a handful of episodes way back in 2006, and yet here we are, saying our fond farewells just short of 10 years down the line.

But those years haven't been without drama. We've seen teachers and pupils come and go, giving show bosses the chance to tackle a range of issues affecting young people today, and there's even been a relocation amidst all that, from Rochdale to Greenock.

Original cast members Jason Merrells, Angela Griffin and Jamie Glover are long gone, but Laurie Brett, who plays Christine Mulgrew, is now one of the current cast's longest-serving members.

It's been a particularly busy couple of months for her, what with the live EastEnders episodes celebrating the soap's 30th anniversary in addition to Waterloo coming to an end, but she can quickly bring to mind some of her most memorable scenes from the series. "Two in particular stand out for me," she explains. "Episode 13 in series 8 when Christine's ex-husband turns up and the revelations of her really dark past come out, and episode 19 of series 9 when she quite spectacularly falls off the wagon and has a meltdown at the school. Both episodes were really challenging and all-consuming but I think it's been the best work I've ever done."

Asked why she thinks the show has done so well for all these years, she says: "It's one of the few shows that a whole family including grandparents, parents and kids can find appealing enough to sit down and watch together. And it gives them an inroad to then talk about really topical issues and it's very rare to find a TV programme that allows that."

Brett adds: "I will really miss Christine, I have adored playing her. In five years' time, she'll be on a gorgeous beach with George Windsor, sipping non-alcoholic cocktails."

Well… it's probably safe to say the actress won't be left twiddling her thumbs and short of work.

As the series wraps up, the school pulls out all the stops in a desperate bid to halt the merger with Havelock High, and with no Vaughan, the students take matters into their own hands and try to uncover the council's real plans, after discovering it's been less than transparent before now. But with the council and its supporters out in force to convince the community and parents that the merger is the best outcome for everyone, who will win?

Meanwhile, Marco has suspicions about Lorna's ex-husband. However, his meddling only serves to land him and Kenzie in a dangerous situation.

Speaking of Kenzie, she has a decision to make – who will finally win her heart, Scott or Justin?

Neil Pearson, Stefano Braschi, Lorna Aikman and Charlotte Beaumont are among the top-drawer cast starring alongside Laurie Brett.

Waterloo Road, Monday, BBC1, 11.15pm

BEST OF THE REST

MONDAY
10,000 BC
Channel 5, 10pm
Not to be confused with Roland Emmerich's pre-historic namesake epic, this spin on the Big Brother formula was inevitable at some point. Take a bunch of eclectic strangers, dress them like extras from Hammer classic One Million Years BC, and film them as they attempt to survive in the wild, without Wi-fi or take-out. In the final episode, there are just six days to go. Following Paul's departure from the experiment and Mike ill in the medic tent with possible liver damage, four people remain in camp. New leader Mel is working harder than ever in Mike's absence, and is concerned that she will be the next one to crack. Alas, things go from bad to worse when a sudden frost leaves foraging impossible.

TUESDAY
MasterChef
BBC1, 9pm
New series. John Torode and Gregg Wallace return to put more keen cooks to the test. The first five hopefuls begin by serving up their Calling Card, a dish that showcases their talent – and this year, it carries a prize as the judges' two favourites will sail through to the third round. Then it's new challenge the Reinvention Test, in which they create a new plate of food based on their main ingredient from the first round, before one goes home and the rest cook dinner for a trio of former MasterChef champions.

Nurse
BBC2, 10pm
If you note Paul Whitehouse's name in a new comedy, the chances are you're going to pay a certain degree of attention – and, rest assured, you won't be disappointed here. He stars in this comedy, adapted by David Cummings and himself from their Radio 4 series of the same name, about a community psychiatric nurse on her rounds as she visits her patients in their homes. The comic explains: "Nurse is a project close to my heart, it's an opportunity to explore issues and characters at a deeper level, while trying to find humour and hope in difficult situations." Esther Coles stars as Liz, the nurse, while Whitehouse takes on roles including an agoraphobic and a soldier with post-traumatic stress disorder.

WEDNESDAY
24 Hours in A&E
Channel 4, 9pm
For most of us, a hard day at the office includes little more than one's email playing up and the coffee machine running out of cups. So spare a thought for the people featured in this series, following life in a busy A&E department – where matters of life and death are a daily constant. This week, the staff help Nikki, 50, and her mum Angela, 68, after they are involved in a serious road traffic accident, leaving both of them with several complex injuries. Meanwhile, 53-year-old Ellen arrives at the unit after falling over in a shop and injuring her elbow, and seven-year-old Jack is rushed to hospital after suffering an open fracture to his arm and a blow to the head as a result of an accident at a wedding.

Bear Grylls: Mission Survive, Friday, ITV, 9pm

THURSDAY
Comic Relief: Operation Health
BBC1, 9pm
As part of this year's Comic Relief, Lenny Henry leads a team of celebrities on a mission to rebuild a decrepit rural health centre in Uganda. What they find are semi-derelict buildings with no running water, no electricity and an infestation of rats and other vermin. As a result, many patients are too scared to stay the night. Can Dermot O'Leary, John Bishop, Richard Hammond, Steve Backshall, Doon Mackichan and Greg James give the centre the kiss of life it so desperately needs?

FRIDAY
Comic Relief – Face the Funny
BBC1, 7pm
Red Nose Day returns with an evening of entertainment to raise money for disadvantaged people in the UK and Africa, and this year the fun comes live from the London Palladium. Lenny Henry and Davina McCall kick off the first hour of laughs, which includes Rowan Atkinson in a new Mr Bean sketch. At 8pm, David Walliams joins Davina as co-host, and from 9pm, Davina and John Bishop present a brand new Little Britain sketch.

Bear Grylls: Mission Survive
ITV, 9pm
As the remaining six celebrities pass the halfway point of the 12-day mission, they are starting to toughen up, but with one suffering from mosquito bites and another requiring treatment for trench foot, life in the jungle is beginning to take its toll. Arriving at a two-mile cave system, the contestants have to eat tarantulas' legs for breakfast, before using their rope skills to navigate the tight spaces and waterfall descents ahead, keeping a lookout for snakes, bats – and their dinner, a fresh pig carcass that Bear has hidden somewhere in the cave.

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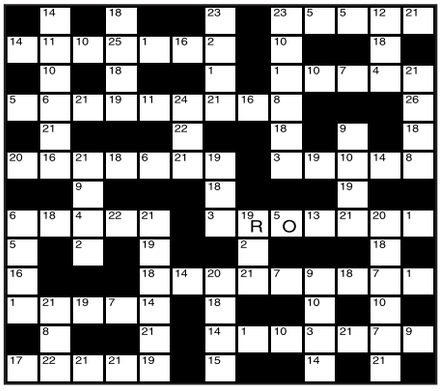
Codeword

Each number in the grid represents a different letter of the alphabet and every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letter(s) to the right of the main grid to start you off.



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LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	10	11	12	13
O	R	F	S	I	V	G	X	M	P	Q	U	N
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
D	A	E	Z	Y	C	W	T	L	J	K	H	B

Double Crossword

Choose either quick or cryptic clues - both fit the same grid.

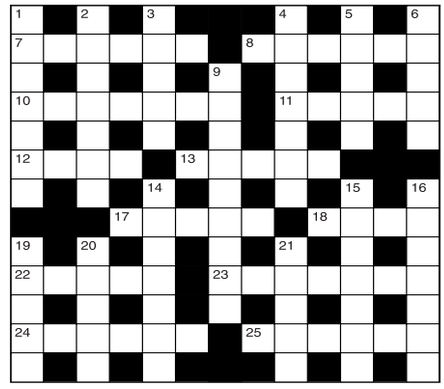
Cryptic Clues:

Across

7. Odd description of something rough (6)
8. Not French apparently, but it could be (6)
10. At length speaks of details (7)
11. Admit defeat and throw it in (5)
12. Has wrongly won a point (4)
13. New bread out of its wrapping (5)
17. Pronounce as absolute (5)
18. It becomes inflamed by the lash (4)
22. Raffle a number, in a manner of speaking (5)
23. Never finishing, due to lack of time? (7)
24. This boat may be tied up (6)
25. Figure it's all round (6)

Down

1. Open exit (7)
2. He has a fish for curing (7)
3. Likely to snap under pressure (5)
4. Stories about raids (7)
5. Opinions wives expressed differently (5)
6. Be quiet with a beer or a mineral (5)
9. Property conveyance? (6,3)
14. Studio that is later converted (7)
15. Soaked in the deepest concoction (7)
16. Lead on? (7)
19. Choose to make a fuss over physical exercise (5)
20. A month in advance (5)
21. Large quantities out of shape (5)



Quick Clues:

Across

7. Foreign (6)
8. Fold (6)
10. Full (7)
11. Cast (5)
12. Location (4)
13. Tranquillity (5)
17. Commonplace (5)
18. Rip (4)
22. Stir (5)
23. Sundry (7)
24. Comrade (6)
25. Hide (6)

Down

1. Quell (7)
2. Contend (7)
3. Tendon (5)
4. Introduction (7)
5. Swift (5)
6. Edge (5)
9. Faulty (9)
14. Liberty (7)
15. Enthusiast (7)
16. Give (7)
19. Surly (5)
20. Hector (5)
21. Cost (5)

Sudoku

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				8		7		
				6		5	4	2
4		6						8
				4		1	2	
7	8		3		2			

Fill in the grid below so that every column, every row and each of the 3x3 boxes contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS >

2	4	8	1	3	9	5	7	6
6	5	9	7	4	2	3	1	8
3	7	1	8	6	5	9	4	2
5	9	7	2	1	8	4	6	3
4	2	3	5	9	6	7	8	1
1	8	6	4	7	3	2	5	9
7	3	2	6	8	4	1	9	5
8	1	5	9	2	7	6	3	4
9	6	4	3	5	1	8	2	7

LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS: CRYPTIC - Across: 1 Cadet; 4 Stirrup; 8 Outfits; 9 Slice; 10 Shop; 11 Terriers; 13 Chit; 14 Knot; 16 Penchant; 17 Brag; 20 Shrug; 21 Allegro; 22 Silence; 23 Put up. Down: 1 Cross purposes; 2 Ditto; 3 Trim; 4 System; 5 Insuring; 6 Raiment; 7 Pressure group; 12 Michigan; 13 Control; 15 Inmate; 18 Right; 19 Clap. QUICK - Across: 1 Obese; 4 Benefit; 8 Trivial; 9 Clear; 10 Fate; 11 Crotchet; 13 Deep; 14 Very; 16 Impaired; 17 Idea; 20 Naive; 21 Curtail; 22 Elector; 23 Glass. Down: 1 Out of patience; 2 Exist; 3 Evil; 4 Belfry; 5 Niceties; 6 Freshly; 7 Turn the tables; 12 Sediment; 13 Deprive; 15 Fencer; 18 Drama; 19 Prig.

Quiz

1. What is kerosene called in the UK?
2. Who ranks immediately below Lord Chief Justice?
3. In which Australian city was Prince Charles rushed by David Kang?
4. How is paralysis agitans otherwise known?
5. Which US secret society was formed in 1866?
6. How is the rose bay shrub otherwise known?
7. In which religion is nirvana the attainment of perfect serenity?
8. Which two countries share the Pindus Mountains?
9. Which English writer's first novel was Crome Yellow?
10. Of which great orchestra was James Galway a member from 1969-75?

Last week's solutions:

Quiz: 1 Jimmy Carter; 2 Tottenham Hotspur; 3 Parsifal; 4 Cribbage; 5 John Gummer; 6 F R Leavis; 7 Speed skating; 8 DNA; 9 Flamenco; 10 Southern Cross.

Niner: PARCHMENT

Niner

Each number from 1 to 9 represents a different letter. Solve the clues and insert the letters in the appropriate squares to discover a word which uses all nine letters.

639 gives an animal,
53124 gives a snake,
23178 gives a bird.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Opportunity to buy unique penthouse apartment

THIS unique penthouse apartment within a period conversion in Malt Mill Lane, Halesowen, is for sale through Robert Oulsnam at £174,950 with no upward chain.

Finished to a high standard, features include wood-effect floors, beams, original and skylight windows and contemporary fittings.

It has an entrance hallway, an open plan lounge, kitchen and dining area, a bathroom, bedroom one with a walk-in wardrobe/dressing area and a further bedroom with a walk-in wardrobe/dressing area.

There are night storage heaters in the property and hot water is provided by a system within the bathroom. Prospective purchasers are advised to book a viewing soon.

For further information contact Robert Oulsnam on 0121 4299986 or visit www.oulsnam.net website.

Stunning detached packed with charm

A STUNNING character detached property, 78 Mushroom Green, Dudley, is beautifully decorated throughout.

It is for sale through Dixons Estate Agents at £280,000.

Having gated parking it has an entrance hall with stairs off and tiled flooring, a living room with a feature gas fireplace, a dining room with an electric fire, a kitchen with oak units, an integrated dishwasher, a fan assisted oven with four point electric hob and extractor hood over and tiled flooring, utility, WC, three bedrooms (master en suite), bathroom and a garage.

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GUIDE PRICE £120,000 PLUS
CONTACT STOURPORT OFFICE: 01299 822060

School Lane Hagley DY9 9LD
A semi detached investment cottage, living room, kitchen, wc, 2 bedrooms, bathroom, garden. The property is let on an Assured Shorthold Tenancy. Energy Rating E
GUIDE PRICE £125,000 PLUS
CONTACT STOURPORT OFFICE: 01299 822060

School Lane Hagley DY9 9LD
A semi detached cottage, living room, kitchen, bathroom, 2 bedrooms, garden. Vacant possession upon completion. Energy Rating E
GUIDE PRICE £125,000 PLUS
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Wood Street Kidderminster DY11 6UB
A spacious four bedroom end of terrace house. Ex-off-licence on prominent corner position. Living Room. Dining Room. Kitchen. Cellarage. Four Bedrooms. Family Bathroom. Gas to radiator central heating. EPC: E
GUIDE PRICE £70,000- £80,000
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Bullus Road Stourport DY13 9DG
A spacious and extended 2/3 bedroom 2-bathroom semi detached house requiring refurbishment. Substantial modern side extension and good sized south facing rear gardens. Living room, separate dining room or ground floor bedroom 3, bathroom, kitchen, 2 bedrooms, further first floor bathroom, off road parking. Vacant possession upon completion. Energy Rating E
GUIDE PRICE £85,000- £105,000
CONTACT STOURPORT OFFICE: 01299 822060

Fort Mahon Place Bewdley DY12 2PB
A substantial and traditionally built two double bedroom detached bungalow. Hall. Bathroom. Recently refitted Kitchen. Living Room. Integral Garage. Driveway plus fore and rear gardens. Double glazed. Gas to radiator central heating. Energy Rating E
GUIDE PRICE £125,000- £140,000
CONTACT KIDDERMINSTER OFFICE: 01562 822244

Redstone Lane Stourport DY13 0JQ
A 3-bedroom link semi detached house requiring up-grading and re-fitting. Recessed porch, reception hall, through lounge/dining room, kitchen, 3 bedrooms, bathroom, off road parking, south facing rear gardens, immense further potential, vacant possession upon completion. Energy Rating D
GUIDE PRICE £100,000- £120,000
CONTACT STOURPORT OFFICE: 01299 822060

Shrawley Avenue K'minster DY11 7NP
A 3-bedroom semi detached "Wates" style pre-fabricated re-inforced concrete (PRC) house built around 1949 and having a large plot on the fringe of the Rifle Range Estate in Kidderminster. Reception hall, through lounge/dining room, kitchen, 3 bedrooms, bathroom, vacant possession upon completion. Energy Rating D
GUIDE PRICE £60,000- £70,000
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Tanwood Lane Chaddesley Corbett DY10 4NT
A detached country cottage surrounded by open countryside and standing on a good level plot approaching 1.3 acres or thereabouts. The property is set within a particularly nice rural but not isolated location between Chaddesley Corbett and Belbroughton. A very rare opportunity within this incredibly sought after area. Vacant possession upon completion Energy Rating G
GUIDE PRICE £250,000- £300,000
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Hartlebury Road Stourport DY13 9NL
A spacious and extended red brick 2/3 bedroom end terraced Victorian house with a waterside position, requiring refurbishment and repair. Living room, kitchen, breakfast room/ground floor bedroom 3, ground floor wet room/wc, 2 bedrooms, first floor bathroom, attic room, vacant possession upon completion. Energy Rating F
GUIDE PRICE £65,000- £85,000
CONTACT STOURPORT OFFICE: 01299 822060

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About one mile from the village, it is approached via a long driveway. The two-bedroomed home has an entrance hall, large bathroom, country-style kitchen, conservatory, lounge with log burner, two bedrooms (master with wardrobes). There is a swimming pool, hot tub, BBQ area, dog kennels and run. Contact (01384) 261997 or visit www.gandtproperties.co.uk

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X hits the spot for Fiat

By David Banner

Fiat has expanded its highly successful 500 franchise in the shape of the dinky 500X SUV.

The Fiat 500X joins the crossover fray, offering a neat and stylish extension of the 500 franchise. With a choice of front or all-wheel drive, some modern diesel and petrol engines and some aggressive pricing, this one's going to be extremely popular.

The front-wheel drive models will doubtless prove more popular with British buyers who are about as likely to take the 500X off-roading as they are to send it round the Nurburgring.

You'll need to pay attention to the badging.

A 500X Cross Plus has all-wheel drive but a 500X Cross merely looks as if it does. This being Fiat, we get a range of excellent engines right from the get-go.

The petrol engines comprise a 109bhp 1.6-litre E-torQ and the more sophisticated 138bhp 1.4-litre Turbo MultiAir2 unit.

Go diesel and you're looking at the smooth 118bhp 1.6-litre MultiJet II for front-wheel drive applications and the 138bhp 2.0-litre MultiJet II if you want four-wheel drive, the latter being mated to a nine(!)-speed automatic transmission. The manual 'boxes get six speeds, unless you're looking at the entry-level 1.6-litre E-torQ transmission, which makes do with five ratios.

Fiat has also developed 168bhp 1.4-litre and 184bhp 2.4 petrol powerplants for this car, both with the auto and all-wheel drive.

The 1.6-litre diesel that will attract most footfall here in the UK is respectably brisk, getting to 62mph in 10.5 seconds, while delivering a 320Nm slug of torque.

The all-wheel drive models aren't designed to handle quite the same terrain as the related Jeep Renegade (which gets additional underbody strengthening), but there are tight approach and departure angles and reasonable 179mm of ground clearance that will help drivers tackle light rough terrain. That compares to 162mm you get on front-wheel drive models.

The 4x4 500X models are also equipped with specific bumpers and protective skid plates to protect the bodywork and mechanicals from the rigours of off-road use.

Original

The 500X's curvaceous roofline and windows is instantly reminiscent of the original Cinquecento. It's certainly something we can imagine proving very popular indeed, and which will give its rivals plenty to worry about.

There will always be resistance to any manufacturer that extends the scope of a retro reissue beyond that of the original car.

People lambasted MINI for doing just this with cars like the Countryman and Paceman, but if the job is done well, the buying public does comes round.

The 500X certainly looks the part and continues a long tradition of small all-wheel drive Fiats, so it's not just a bit of a wheeze dreamed up by some kid in the marketing department with the ink still wet on his MBA certificate.

The styling is neat and assured, it fills a genuinely useful gap in the range, succeeding the Sedici, and the engineering that underpins it is all reassuringly right and exact.

Fiat has priced it aggressively, equipped it generously and it's got enough room inside to fulfil that crossover remit. In other words it's an extremely compelling package.

Prices start at £14,595.

'Fiat has priced it aggressively, equipped it generously and it's got room enough inside to fulfil that crossover remit.'

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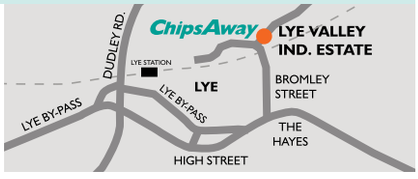

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Hot-hatch icon reborn in race car for the road

Commercial feature

After a five year wait, 2015 sees the arrival of the world's keenly anticipated hot hatch, the Honda Civic Type R. Billed as a 'race car for the road', the all-new Civic Type R will set new standards in the high-performance front-wheel drive hatchback segment.

The production version of Honda's latest hot hatch icon was revealed for the first time at the 85th Geneva Motor this week.

Type R vehicles have garnered a cult following around the world and the new model more than lives up to the high expectations. A world-first application of Honda's new 2.0-litre VTEC TURBO engine, aggressive function-led styling, and pioneering new chassis technologies combine to deliver one of the most immersive and rewarding driving experiences available in any sector.

The new 2015 Civic Type R will be powered by the most extreme and high-performing engine in the 22-year history of the red 'H' badge, signalling the start of a new performance era for the Honda brand.

At the heart of the Civic Type R is an all-new, direct-injected turbocharged 2.0 litre VTec Turbo petrol engine, which delivers power, torque and performance figures unmatched in the front-wheel drive hot hatch segment. Peak power output is 310PS at 6,500rpm, and peak torque is 400Nm at 2,500rpm – both higher than for any previous Honda Type R model.

Red-lining at 7,000rpm, the engine – part of Honda's next-generation Earth Dreams Technology series – features an advanced new turbocharger with VTec technology that boosts low-end torque and delivers sustained acceleration.

The Civic Type R's blistering performance is unmatched in the front-wheel drive hot hatch segment: the 0-to-100km/h (62 mph) sprint is covered in just 5.7 seconds – making it the fastest accelerating performance front-wheel drive hatchback – and top speed, where permitted, is a class-leading 270km/h (167 mph).

Rewarding

The new engine is mated to a slick-shifting six-speed manual transmission, safeguarding an intimate, rewarding connection with the drivetrain, and power is directed through the front wheels.

The styling changes that are unique to the Civic Type R give the car an aggressive, purposeful stance, yet almost all have a functional purpose. The sleek and aerodynamically-efficient design reflects a car developed to perform at speed. The focus on aerodynamics has ensured high-speed stability and high levels of downforce.

To achieve this aim, the Civic Type R was subject to exhaustive aerodynamic analysis, testing and development. The development team tirelessly pursued its objectives through computer-based CFD modelling and wind tunnel testing at Honda's dedicated automotive motorsports facility in Sakura, Japan; home of Honda's Formula One engine development.

A new, almost completely flat underside aids airflow under the vehicle and combines with a rear diffuser to optimise downforce – effectively 'sucking' the car onto the road.

The rear wing has been reimagined from the Type R Concept. The structure of the airfoil – its angle, height and shape as well as its vertical end plates – have been carefully engineered to optimise downforce without causing a significant increase in drag at higher speeds. This helps improve road-holding abilities, particularly through high-speed corners.

A wide front splitter and deep side skirts also manage airflow and reduce lift, while the front bumper has been shaped specifically to inhibit air turbulence around the front wheels, enhancing high-speed stability and reducing lift forces.

To help the driver manage the Type R's power, the car is equipped with a high performance Brembo brake package, developed specifically for the car. A number of innovative new suspension systems, unique to the Type R, have been introduced to produce rewarding handling characteristics and to maximise power transfer to the road.

The new Civic Type R will mark the debut of the new '+R' button that increases the response of various chassis and drivetrain systems. The result is an even more intense driving experience, ideal for the track and for the genuine sports-driving enthusiast.

When +R mode is activated, engine responsiveness is heightened, with torque-mapping changed to a more aggressive and performance-focused setting. Steering receives reduced power assistance and is therefore more responsive to driver inputs, and basic damping force from the new four-point Adaptive Damper System is increased by 30 per cent. This means the behaviour of the car is firmer and more agile for high-performance handling.

The all-new Honda Civic Type R will go on sale across Europe from this summer. Full vehicle specifications will be announced in due course.

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3 Home & Services

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Runners take on the off-road Hair Raiser

ATHLETES from Dudley Kingswinford Running Club were in action again at the weekend.

The club had a group travelling to Coventry for their half marathon and a small number lining up to compete in Wolverhampton & Bilston's March Hair Raiser

The Hair Raiser is an off road race of roughly six and a half miles which is mapped out near Albrighton.

In Coventry more than 3,500 runners toed the line for the city's 13.1 mile race,.

The course starts in the city centre and climbs gradually over the first half of the race.

The run takes in the Warwickshire villages of Allesley and Keresley before heading slightly downhill back heading towards the city centre to cross the finishing line.

Ben Foster was seventh in a lightning quick time of 1.13.36 coming in only three minutes behind the winner Tom Doe of Lincoln Wellington AC.

Rob Sannwald recorded a distance personal best in 1.22.56 in 58th place, Dave Norman was 129th in 1.25.58, Brian Preston ran a creditable 1.32.50 for 288th after struggling from two miles in, Simon Blizzard ran 1.33.07 for 296th and Mark Homer produced a solid 1.35.53 for 385th.

Closer to home, while the hosts club hoovered up most of the prizes in the March Hair Raiser, Andy Sprague took 11th place in 40.54, Lyn Sprague finished in 52.34 in 75th place, Jacqui Elson-Whittaker was 93rd in 56.02 and John Glover came home in 58.47 to place 114th.

Chess club tackles adjourned games

IN a surprising start to the week, Westminster returned to play two adjourned games in Birmingham league division 5 for what appeared to be a futile exercise.

Stourbridge Chess Club (SCC) led 2.5-1.5 and were ahead in each adjournment to such a degree that at least one should have been resigned.

Jeremy Humphries only drew his apparently won position, but Colin Woodall grabbed a win. At 4-2 Stourbridge still look good for promotion with the potential title showdown against Redditch.

Tuesday was the Terrill semi-final. SCC Birmingham league division 3 team were playing at Olton division 1. South Birmingham 1A had won the other semi-final the previous night. SCC had a healthy 3.5 point handicap advantage.

SCC put up a good show all round, despite being heavily out graded, and it was well past the two-hour mark before any decisive action took place. Dave Scriven was first to finish on board two; his opponent played a winning rook sacrifice and Scriven resigned.

Next to finish was Steve Jukes on board one, who resigned . SCC were now 2-0 down and needing 1.5 from the remaining four boards.

John Foxall had been playing aggressively on board four, but Smith had countered strongly and was looking good, then Foxall found a winning resource and his opponent resigned.

Paul Sharratdefended well. Sadly, it was to no avail and his position reached virtual zugzwang before Lloyd ended the struggle making it 3-1 to Olton.

On board five Eric Horwill had looked to be in dire straits early on, no fewer than four pawns down. But Eric is a tough competitor, and battled on undaunted to improve both his position and the material deficit by the close. Adjourned with an open game, he still has chances against Batchelor.

On board six Tony Shaw had started quietly against Rich Reynolds, but by the time they adjourned he had built a very strong position and was looking good for a result (and a draw is all SCC need to take the match).

Wolves are tipped to find place in play-offs

WOLVES are being backed to make the play-offs – because they have got the lot.

Former Molineux striker Nathan Blake, who watched their 1-0 victory at Cardiff on Saturday, reckons they have the quality in their ranks to finish in the top six.

"I fancy them to go as far as anyone – they're a solid, good, athletic outfit with a bit of pace, bit of power, bit of prowess – they've got it all," said Blake, who scored one of Wolves' goals in the 2003 play-off final win to the Premier League.

"On this form, I'd back them to make the play-offs and if this Wolves team doesn't, they should be very disappointed."

Blake, 43, added: "Wolves look very good – they look strong, athletic and show plenty of good skill and power in their ranks.

"They have a good solid midfield – Kevin McDonald did very well on Saturday and Bakary Sako was brilliant. They've got a good mix – a bit of everything."

Blake believes Wolves need to show more urgency about their play to be even better.

"Kenny maybe just needs to get them moving the ball a bit quicker and if they do, I can't see any reason why they can't be right up there," said the former Wales frontman.

who scored 26 goals in 85 games in gold and black from 2001-04.

"You're talking about just polishing the edges for the final run-in."

"I think the only criticism of them on Saturday was they played in second gear. If they'd have ended up drawing that game, they'd have been so disappointed."

Yeltz side lose their lead and the game

Halesowen Town 2 Ashton United 3

PLAY-OFF chasing Ashton struck three goals in eight minutes at the start of the second half to complete the double over Halesowen.

But it was Halesowen who took a fifth minute lead to end their goal-drought with an own goal when visiting captain Jason Gorton turned Tom Tonks's cross into his own net.

Gorton's fortunes worsened when he was replaced after a long delay for a head injury.

Home goalkeeper Matt Sargeant came to Halesowen's rescue twice by saving from Kevin Leadbetter and Martin Pilkington before Joe Hull and Asa Charlton both went close in further Yeltz pressure late in the first half.

But the Robins turned the game on its head to punish Halesowen in a dramatic twist immediately after the interval.

Lee Rick curled home a 20-yard equaliser into the top corner in the 48th minute with the Yeltz defence slow to clear before Pilkington shattered the Yeltz with a sparkling brace to give Ashton a 3-1 lead.

Shrugged

Pacy Pilkington drilled home a long clearance from his goalkeeper Paul Phillips in the 50th minute and then shrugged off Charlton to slam home his second goal from the edge of the area just three minutes later.

The Yeltz pulled a goal back in the 66th minute when Hull helped on another long Tonks throw-in and Aaron Griffiths swept home at the far post.

Three further efforts from Tonks, Ben Haseley and Charlton were cleared off the Ashton line and couldn't prevent Halesowen's third consecutive defeat.

Halesowen Town: Sargeant; Green, Griffiths, Forde, Hull (c), Tilt, Charlton (Turner 82), Tonks, Christie (Bragoli 76), Haseley (Daniels 76), Jones.

Unused Subs: MacKenzie, S. Pearson (GK).

Ashton United: Phillips; Wilson, G. Pearson, Gorton (c) (Haslam 19), Higgins, Young, Rick, Gee, Johnson (Oates 80), Pilkington, Leadbetter (Robinson 77).

Unused Subs: Hill, Sherratt.

Sweet victory for Old Hales

Chris Hooper who did more than his fair share of scoring in the game goes on the run

Bournville 10 Old Halesonians 39

THERE was no doubt this would be a tough game against a Bournville side desperate for points.

A mixture of rushed moves, bad decision making saw nothing to show for 20 minutes pressure.

The home side were ecstatic with their defensive effort, but it was more lack of finishing that was hindering Hales. On the 21st minute after numerous phases by the pack, the ball was finally sent through the hands to winger Patrick Luftkin, who raced over in the corner for an unconverted try to lead 0-5.

The home side took advantage close to half time and from a lineout scored a well-worked, converted try as the ref blew for half time.

After one minute of the second half , Carl Robinson sprinted from 40 metres for an unconverted try to lead. On 47 minutesChris Hooper scored and converted a try.

Bournville were awarded a penalty which took the score to 10 - 17. Wing Warren Oliverscored followed by fellow wing Pat Luftkin , Hooper converting.

Pete Fitzgerald scored a great try, Hooper converted and them sealed the win with a drop kick. .

Hughes bows out of darts in second stage

TIPTON'S Jamie Hughes bowed out of the BDO World Darts Trophy at the second round stage upon his return to televised arrows.

The Black Country thrower had impressed at the first hurdle on Friday night, with a 6-0 whitewash of Japanese opponent Hiroaki Shimizu.

That brought him back to the oche on Saturday night to take on Stefaan Deprez, who had stunned two-time BDO world championship finalist Tony O'Shea in the first round.

But Hughes was defeated 7-4 as proceedings reverted to the best of 14 legs, leaving him unable to capitalise on progress this year.

His exit at Manchester's Event City, with the Eurosport cameras on hand, was tempered by his third ranking title in January.

TD let lead go to get share of the points

Team Dudley 1 Trysull 1

AFTER a free weekend Team Dudley entertained Trysull at The Dell Stadium.

Trysull have the meanest defence in the division, three of the 23 goals that they have conceded were actually in the reverse fixture as Team Dudley ran out 3-2 winners that day, their eighth place standing though shows how unforgiving this league can be if you don't have enough throughout the team.

Second-from-bottom TD grabbed a point towards West Midlands Division One survival with a 1-1 home draw against Trysull.

Nathan Jones fired them in front after 48 minutes when he ran on to a James Hill pass and shot past keeper Mark Reach. The lead lasted three minutes, with Mark Cartwright heading home.

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Injuries put dampener on Baggies win

Albion 1 Southampton 0

On a day when Albion took a major leap towards their primary goal, the sight of both Saido Berahino and Brown Ideye limping off in the second half was the one blot on an otherwise pleasing landscape.

Boss Tony Pulis would not have swapped the three points against the Saints for anything.

But if the injuries to his first-choice strikers prevents one or both of them from figuring against the Claret and Blues, then a vital, hard-fought victory will have come at a cost.

Still, long before he limped off just before the hour mark with a worrying-looking foot problem, Berahino had already provided the moment of brilliance that made the discipline, hard work and decent play of his team-mates count.

His superbly-executed half-volley just 70 seconds into the game was the latest example of the outstanding talent that the 21-year-old boy wonder possesses in his feet.

And with Pulis at the helm, the often temperamental young forward is currently getting things right between the ears, too.

If his 17th goal of a stellar season was the moment that most will remember and the one that underlined his return to his early-season goalscoring form, then the rest of his display was proof positive that Pulis has the arch-goalscorer buying into his team philosophy too.

Brown Ideye's emergence as a Premier League starter and as Pulis' chosen leader of the line has meant a switch for Berahino to a deeper-lying role where defensive duties are more vital than ever.

Yet far from sulk about the switch, the youngster has embraced the challenge .

No spring in step after a miserable month for Glassboys

Curzon Ashton 3 Stourbridge 0

THREE second half goals from Curzon Ashton saw their winless run during last month extend to six games.

Curzon enjoyed the better of the opening half, but Stourbridge had their chances as well, Luke Benbow seeing a shot saved.

The half-hour mark saw a flurry of chances as Benbow and Kayelden Brown tested the hosts' keeper, while at the other end Joe Guest headed narrowly wide.

The hosts needed less than 60 seconds of the second half to break the deadlock, Alex Brown shooting low under Dean Coleman.

Coleman had to save smartly from Sam Walker's free-kick, while the Glassboys were struggling to make an impression.

It took Curzon until 15 minutes from time to double their lead, Niall Cummins heading in, and the win was sealed five minutes later as Matty Warburton fired home the third.

The Glassboys have dropped to 12th in the Evo-Stik Premier table due to their recent stuttering form.

Heathens fans to get look at new team

Speedway

CRADLEY Speedway fans will get their first chance to see the new-look team in action next week.

The Heathens are chasing a third successive National League title at their new Perry Barr base after making the switch from Wolverhampton during the winter.

And the team, with four new signings, will be put through their paces next Wednesday, March 11.

They will be on track from 2pm for the press and practice session which greets the start of every season and members of the public are welcome to attend. That same evening the team and management will be at Brierley Hill's Copthorne Hotel to meet fans and sponsors from 8pm – and the 2015 race jacket will also be revealed.

Heathens boss Will Pottinger said: "Now it's getting close we are all very excited about the new season.

"It's a great time of the year and me and the boys are looking forward to the evening at the Copthorne."

Michael Neale, one of the club's new signings, is counting down the days to the new campaign.

He said: "I'm just really keen to get back on the bike now and I can't wait for the season to start.

"I've been working hard to try and get everything ready and I'm feeling prepared, I'm just excited to start riding again and pull on a Heathens race jacket."

Admission is £5 for the Copthorne event with all money raised going to the riders to assist with pre-season machinery expenditure.

The new Heathens race jacket will be on display. Tickets are available from the club shop on Quarry Bank High Street (Printworx) or from cradleyheathens.co.

TARGET SPURS WOLVES SQUAD

Cardiff 0 Wolves 1

SINCE head coach Kenny Jackett set his team a target of 30 points from the final 15 games, they have won all three, leaving 21 to get from 12.

And since unfortunately losing to Bournemouth on December 6, Wolves have won nine and drawn three of the 14 games that followed.

Coincidence or not, that improvement has come since the introduction of supposed centre-backs Dominic Iorfa and Kortney Hause in the full-back positions.

Jackett and the players deserve huge credit because at the depth of their November nadir, most envisaged a winter of mid-table struggle.

But lessons have been learned quickly and they are evolving into a formidable Championship force.

Jackett is continually looking at ways to improve the team and when he gambled on a bold switch to 4-4-2 five games ago, he could not have envisaged just how successful it was going to be.

But four wins, 13 goals and three clean sheets later, his decision looks more than justified.

Formations

It's often said players and not formations win games, and Wolves couldn't have been happier with the impact of Benik Afobe and the return of Bakary Sako.

The Molineux men have won five and drawn two of their nine games since Afobe arrived from Arsenal. He has scored five goals while Sako, with four in his last three games, has cemented his place at the top of the club scoring charts with 11.

But the evidence isn't confined to mere statistics. As Jackett says, the fleet-footed Afobe has given Wolves another dimension.

It may seem strange to those who weren't there to witness it, but Wolves were more convincing in Saturday's 1-0 win over Cardiff than in the 5-0 over Rotherham seven days earlier.

Why? Because in the last two games, they have shown a capacity and maturity to see out games that was perhaps missing earlier in the season.

And the process of evolvement has manifested itself in other ways than the solid defence and the more potent attack. Sako's neat sidefooted match-winner in the 26th minute was one of only three chances for the visitors. Afobe, who brilliantly crafted the opening for the goal with a blistering run before slipping the ball to Van La Parra for a low cross deflected into Sako's path, had the other two.

He guided a free header over the bar from Sako's free-kick and later hit David Marshall's legs when Peter Whittingham's poor back-pass left him clean through.

It could be argued that Cardiff had more openings, but the hosts only showed the necessary urgency once Whittingham received his marching orders in the 65th minute for a second booking, lunging in on substitute Matt Doherty eight minutes after cynically tripping Afobe.

Any successful team needs luck, and it could be argued that Iorfa could have seen red before Whittingham for a late challenge that didn't bring a second booking. Jackett withdrew him immediately.

On the hour, Jones planted a towering header just wide, before the immaculate Richard Stearman and then Hause cleared off the line in a desperate 70th-minute scramble.

Stearman was there at the death to nod off the line from Jones' header.

Then came the whistle – and suddenly, you wouldn't bet against Wolves making that top six.

Rajiv van La Parra of Wolves in the action with Sean Morrison of Cardiff City

Midfielder Jacobs put up for loan

FORGOTTEN man Michael Jacobs has been made available by Wolves for a loan move.

The 22-year-old attacking midfielder hasn't played since the 2-1 defeat to Bournemouth, the last of 12 appearances the former Derby man has made this season.

Head coach Kenny Jackett refused to allow the ex-Northampton winger out on loan when Birmingham enquired about him in the last loan window in November.

Jackett also blocked him going out in January when Bakary Sako was at the African Cup of Nations. But with Sako, Rajiv Van La Parra and James Henry all fit and flying, Jackett has relented – providing he can secure a replacement before the loan window shuts on Thursday, March 19.

"If there was a loan offer for Michael we'd we'd consider it," said the boss.

"Michael's minutes on the pitch have been limited this season.

"But we don't want to let players out unnecessarily where we wouldn't be able to bring anyone in."

Meanwhile, Jackett has warned Wolves to be true to their team-mates as he insisted there is no excuse not to own up to fatigue.

"You can only tell on the day but we've talked about that and we've said there can't be any excuses," said the boss.

"If people feel they're not really on top form physically, it's their duty to tell me. They need to be right with their team-mates so there can't be an excuse for energy levels."

Jackett has made regular changes and said no players have indicated they are struggling.

Donaldson in good books as blues win

Blues 1 Brentford 0

GARY Rowett richly praised the performance of Clayton Donaldson in Birmingham's vital home win over promotion-chasing Brentford.

Following eight games without a win, the Blues carved out this victory as a result of an unfortunate 40th-minute own goal from Brentford centre-back James Tarkowski.

But they had to hang onto their slender lead after Stephen Gleeson was sent off in the 87th minute for stamping on Alex Pritchard.

Birmingham boss Rowett said: "Clayton Donaldson was brilliant against his old team. He physically imposes himself on the game."

★★★

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